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Ecclesiastes

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unfoldingWord® Translation Notes

Ecclesiastes

Introduction to Ecclesiastes

Part 1: General Introduction

Outline of the Book of Ecclesiastes

The author questions the nature of life and the limits of human wisdom (1:1–6:12)

The author teaches about making wise choices in how one lives (7:1–12:7)

The conclusion and ending (12:8–14)

What is the Book of Ecclesiastes about?

Ecclesiastes is a group of short teachings that try to answer questions such as “What do people gain from all their labor?” Ecclesiastes is a series of thoughts about a variety of subjects, all of them about the purpose and worth of various actions and events. The author concludes that all the work we perform and all the knowledge and skill we gain is like a vapor that disappears, and that we must fear Yahweh and keep his commandments.

How should the title of this book be translated?

The traditional title for this book is “Ecclesiastes.” Its meaning is similar to “religious assembly.” Translators might decide on a title that better describes the content of the book, such as “Words of a Teacher” or “Teachings of a Wise Man.”

Who wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes?

The author appears to be Solomon, “the Teacher, the descendant of David and king in Jerusalem.” This is consistent with what Solomon was known for: * his wisdom (Ecclesiastes 1:16 and twenty-six other references to wisdom); * his vast wealth (Ecclesiastes 2:8), and the pain that comes from wealth ([Ecclesiastes 5:13-14](#); Ecclesiastes 4:8; and Ecclesiastes 9:11); * his large number of servants (Ecclesiastes 2:7 and Ecclesiastes 10:7); * his limitless opportunities for worldly pleasures ([Ecclesiastes 2:1-2](#), [Ecclesiastes 10](#); Ecclesiastes 3:13; Ecclesiastes 4:8; Ecclesiastes 5:4; and Ecclesiastes 12:1); and * the wide range of his many building projects ([Ecclesiastes 2:4-6](#)).

Solomon appears to have written the Book of Ecclesiastes near the end of his life, as he reflected on what he gained from all that he did.

Why are there so many apparent contradictions in the Book of Ecclesiastes?

Some scholars think the author was a faithful man. Other scholars think that the author made bad decisions and was sorrowful when he wrote this book. Apparent contradictions in the book may indicate that Solomon’s faith was sometimes weak. Or, it is also possible that the teachings in the book differ from each other in order to relate to different things happening in the lives of readers.

Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

What does this book teach about how God repays people?

In the ancient Near East, people were concerned with why they were being punished or blessed. They often connected these things to their gods. The writer of Ecclesiastes explains that Yahweh will bless and reward people for the right things they do and punish people for the evil things they do. But this might not happen in this life.

(See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/bless\]\]](#), [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/justice\]\]](#), [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/falsegod\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/righteous\]\]](#) and **evil, wicked, unpleasant (p.315)**)

What value did the Israelites place on the Book of Ecclesiastes?

The Israelites have often questioned the value of this book. This is due in large part to its unusual wording and teachings. At times, it appears to disagree with the rest of Scripture. While many have questioned its authority, it has been affirmed to be Scripture. It gives valuable lessons concerning the uselessness of pursuing any goal other than to give Yahweh glory.

Part 3: Important Translation Issues

What is the meaning of “under the sun?”

“Under the sun” here is another way of saying “on the earth.” When the author says that there is “nothing new under the sun,” this means that every kind of thing has already happened before on the earth. While a particular event may not have specifically occurred before, something similar has already occurred.

How do I translate harsh or shocking passages?

Parts of the Book of Ecclesiastes can be shocking or surprising to read in Scripture. For example, “If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but if his heart is not satisfied with good and he is not buried with honor, then I say that a baby that is born dead is better off than he is” (6:3). The translator should allow these difficulties to remain and not try to make them less surprising.

How is life described in the Book of Ecclesiastes?

The author of Ecclesiastes concludes that everything in this life quickly passes away, like a vapor that disappears. A person’s circumstances or character and even all of the things of this world have little or no significance apart from God. That is because God gives meaning to everything.

At the end of their life, people often say that the years of their life seemed short. The author of Ecclesiastes used the metaphor of vapor or breath to describe how life ends while it seems to be just beginning.

Ecclesiastes 1

Ecclesiastes 1 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations set each line of poetry farther to the right than the rest of the text to make it easier to read. The ULT does this with the poetry in 1:2-11 and 15.

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Tone

The tone of this chapter is sad, or depressing. The author believes that everything in life is pointless. The metaphors in this chapter all describe the idea that nothing ever changes. This is also known as “fatalism.” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#))

Ecclesiastes 1:1

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 1:2

Like a vapor of mist, like a breeze in the wind, everything vanishes

This speaks of how everything in life vanishes and has no lasting value as if everything were like a disappearing vapor or breeze. Alternate translation: "Like a vapor of mist vanishes and like a breeze in the wind disappears, everything vanishes and has no lasting value" (See: **Simile (p.304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

Ecclesiastes 1:3

What profit does mankind gain & under the sun?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that man's work is pointless and has no lasting benefit. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "Mankind gains no profit ... under the sun." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. Alternate translation: "on the earth" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 1:4

General Information:

General Information:

The writer is presenting the natural order of life as he understands it.

Ecclesiastes 1:5

hurries back to the place

This speaks of how the sun sets at the end of the day and is soon ready to rise again, as if it were a person that quickly ran from the place where it sets to the place from which it rises. Alternate translation: “quickly returns to the place” or “quickly goes to the place” (See: **Personification (p.296)**) (See: **Personification (p.296)**)

Ecclesiastes 1:6

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 1:7

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 1:8

Everything becomes wearisome

"Everything becomes tiring." Since man is unable to explain these things, it becomes useless to try.

The eye is not satisfied by what it sees

Here the "eye" represents the whole person. Alternate translation: "A person is not satisfied by what his eyes see" (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

nor is the ear fulfilled by what it hears

Here the "ear" represents the whole person. Alternate translation: "nor is a person content by what his ears hear" (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

Ecclesiastes 1:9

General Information:

General Information:

There is nothing new regarding man and his activities.

whatever has been done is what will be done

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “whatever has happened before is what will happen again” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 1:10

Is there anything about which it may be said, 'Look, this is new'?

This rhetorical question is asked to emphasize that man cannot say there is anything new. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "There is nothing about which it may be said, 'Look, this is new.'" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

about which it may be said

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "about which someone may say" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 1:11

that will happen in the future

The understood subject may be supplied. Alternate translation: “the things that will happen in the future” (See: **Ellipsis (p.261)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.261)**)

will not likely be remembered either

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “people will not likely remember them either” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 1:12

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 1:13

I applied my mind

Here the author refers to himself by his “mind” to emphasize his thoughts. Alternate translation: “I determined” or “I applied myself” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

to study and to search out

These two phrases mean the same thing and emphasize how diligently he studied. (See: **Doublet (p.259)**) (See: **Doublet (p.259)**)

under heaven

This refers to things that are done on earth. Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

children of mankind

Alternate translation: “human beings”

Ecclesiastes 1:14

all the deeds that are done

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “everything that people do” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

look

The author uses this word to draw attention to what he says next. Alternate translation: “indeed” or “really” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

amount to vapor & chasing the wind

These two phrases are both metaphors that emphasize the idea of things being useless and futile. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

amount to vapor

“are only mist.” The author speaks of useless and meaningless things as if they were “vapor.” Just as vapor disappears and does not last, things have no lasting value. Alternate translation: “are as useless as vapor” or “are meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

chasing the wind

The author says that everything that people do is as useless as if they were trying to control the wind. Alternate translation: “are as useless as trying to control the wind” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 1:15

The twisted cannot be straightened! The missing cannot be counted

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "People cannot straighten things that are twisted! They cannot count what is not there" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 1:16

I have spoken to my heart

Here the author refers to himself by his “heart” to emphasize his feelings. Alternate translation: “I have spoken to myself” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

My mind has seen

Here the author refers to himself by his “mind” to emphasize what he has learned. Alternate translation: “I have gained” or “I have learned”

Ecclesiastes 1:17

I applied my heart

Here the author refers to himself by his “heart” to emphasize his feelings. Alternate translation: “I determined” or “I applied myself” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

madness and folly

The words “madness” and “folly” share similar meanings and refer to foolish thinking and behavior, respectively. (See: **Doublet (p.259)**) (See: **Doublet (p.259)**)

an attempt to shepherd the wind

The author says learning wisdom and madness and folly is as useless as trying to control the wind. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “as useless as trying to control the wind” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 1:18

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 2

Ecclesiastes 2 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations set each line of poetry farther to the right than the rest of the text to make it easier to read. The ULT does this with the poetry in 2:10-16.

Special concepts in this chapter

Pleasures

When the author thought about the pointlessness of life, he decided to fill it with pointless pleasures. He believed that this type of living would have no effect on the world. Therefore, he indulged in every type of pleasure.

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Assumed knowledge

It is assumed that the author is going to reject the way of living in this chapter. He is certainly not encouraging this way of living even though he does not say this explicitly. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p. 251)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:1

I said in my heart

Here the author refers to himself by his “heart” to emphasize his feelings. Alternate translation: “I said to myself” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

I will test you with happiness

Here the word “you” refers to himself. The word “happiness” can be expressed as an adjective. Alternate translation: “I will test myself with things that make me happy” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

So enjoy pleasure

The word “pleasure” can be expressed as a verb. Alternate translation: “So I will enjoy things that please me” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

this also was just a temporary breeze

This speaks of how happiness only lasts for a short time as if it were a temporary breeze. Alternate translation: “this also only lasted for a short time, like a temporary breeze” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:2

I said about laughter, “It is crazy,”

The direct quotation can be translated as an indirect quotation. Alternate translation: “I said that it is crazy to laugh at things” (See: **Direct and Indirect Quotations (p.254)**) (See: **Direct and Indirect Quotations (p.254)**)

What use is it?

The author uses a rhetorical question to emphasize that pleasure is useless. Alternate translation: “It is useless.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:3

I explored in my heart

This speaks of thinking hard for a long time as if it were exploring. Also, the author speaks of his feelings and his thoughts as if they were his “heart.” Alternate translation: “I thought hard about” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

to gratify my desires with wine

The word “desires” may be expressed as a verbal phrase. Alternate translation: “to use wine to make myself happy” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

I let my mind guide me with wisdom

Here the author speaks of using the wisdom that he had been taught to guide himself as if this wisdom were a person who guided him. Alternate translation: “I thought about the things that wise people had taught me” (See: **Personification (p.296)**) (See: **Personification (p.296)**)

under heaven

This refers to things that are done on earth. Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

during the days of their lives

Alternate translation: “during the time that they are alive”

Ecclesiastes 2:4

I built houses for myself and planted vineyards

The writer probably told people to do the work. Alternate translation: "I had people build houses and plant vineyards for me" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:5

I built for myself gardens and parks; I planted

The writer probably told people to do the work. Alternate translation: "I had people build for me gardens and parks; I had them plant" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

gardens and parks

These two words share similar meanings and refer to beautiful orchards of fruit trees. (See: **Doublet (p.259)**) (See: **Doublet (p.259)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:6

I created

The writer probably told people to do the work. Alternate translation: "I had them create" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

to water a forest

Alternate translation: "to provide water for a forest"

forest where trees were grown

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "forest where trees grew" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:7

I had slaves born in my palace

Alternate translation: "I had slaves that were born in my palace" or "My slaves bore children and they also were my slaves"

much more than any king

The understood verb may be supplied. Alternate translation: "much more than any other king had" (See: **Ellipsis (p. 261)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.261)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:8

the treasures of kings and provinces

This refers to the gold and other wealth that neighboring countries were forced to pay to the king of Israel. Alternate translation: “that I acquired from the treasures of kings and the rulers of provinces” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

provinces

Here “provinces” represents the rulers of the provinces. Alternate translation: “the rulers of provinces” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

the delights of the children of humanity—and many concubines

This means that he had many concubines that he enjoyed sleeping with, as any man enjoys sleeping with women. Alternate translation: “I greatly enjoyed many concubines, as would delight any man” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:9

than all who were before me in Jerusalem

This refers to all the previous rulers of Jerusalem. Alternate translation: “than all the kings who had ruled before me in Jerusalem” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

my wisdom remained with me

This is an idiom. “I continued to act wisely” or “I continued to be wise” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:10

Whatever my eyes desired & from them

Here the author refers to himself by his “eyes” to emphasize what he sees. Alternate translation: “Whatever I saw and desired ... from myself” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

I did not withhold from them

This can be stated positively. Alternate translation: “I got for them”

I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure

Here the author refers to himself by his “heart” to emphasize his desires. This can be stated positively and the word “pleasure” can be expressed as a verb. Alternate translation: “I did not keep myself from any pleasure” or “I allowed myself to enjoy everything that made me happy” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#)) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

my heart rejoiced

Here the author refers to himself by his “heart” to emphasize his desires. Alternate translation: “I rejoiced” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:11

all the deeds that my hands had accomplished

Here the author refers to himself by his "hands." Alternate translation: "all that I had accomplished" (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

vapor & an attempt to shepherd the wind

These two phrases are both metaphors that emphasize the idea of things being useless and futile. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

vapor

"mist." The author speaks of useless and meaningless things as if they were "vapor." See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: "as useless as vapor" or "meaningless" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

an attempt to shepherd the wind

The author says that everything that people do is as useless as if they were trying to control the wind. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: "are as useless as trying to control the wind" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

There was no profit under the sun in it

Alternate translation: "But it had no profit under the sun"

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: "on the earth" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:12

madness and folly

The words “madness” and “folly” have similar meanings and refer to foolish thinking and behavior, respectively. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:17](#). (See: **Doublet (p.259)**) (See: **Doublet (p.259)**)

For what can the next king do who comes after the king, which has not already been done?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize his point that the next king will not be able to do anything more valuable than what he had already done. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “For the next king who comes after the king can do nothing that a king before him has not already done.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

the next king & who comes after the king

Alternate translation: “the king ... who succeeds the current king” or “the next king ... who comes after me”

Ecclesiastes 2:13

wisdom has advantages over folly, just as light is better than darkness

This speaks of how wisdom is better than folly by comparing it to how light is better than darkness. (See: **Simile (p. 304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:14

The wise man uses his eyes in his head to see where he is going

This speaks of a wise man making wise decisions as walking and paying attention to where he is going. Alternate translation: "The wise man is like a person who uses his eyes to see where he is going" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

uses his eyes in his head to see

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: "pays attention and looks to see" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

the fool walks in darkness

This compares a fool making bad decisions to someone walking in darkness. Alternate translation: "the fool is like a person who walks in the dark" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

the same event

death

Ecclesiastes 2:15

I said in my heart

Here the author refers to himself by his “heart” to emphasize his feelings. Alternate translation: “I said to myself” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

So what difference does it make if I am very wise?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that there is no benefit to being wise. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “So it makes no difference if I am very wise.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

I concluded in my heart

Here the author refers to himself by his “heart” to emphasize his feelings. Alternate translation: “I concluded” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

is only vapor

“is only mist.” The author speaks of useless and meaningless things as if they were “vapor.” See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “is as useless as vapor” or “is meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:16

For the wise man, like the fool, is not remembered for very long

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "People do not remember the wise man for very long, just as they do not remember the fool for very long" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

everything will have been long forgotten

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "people will have long forgotten everything" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:17

all the work done

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “all the work that people do” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

was evil to me

Alternate translation: “troubled me”

vapor & an attempt to shepherd the wind

These two phrases are both metaphors that emphasize the idea of things being useless and futile. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

vapor

“mist.” The author speaks of useless and meaningless things as if they were “vapor.” See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “as useless as vapor” or “meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

an attempt to shepherd the wind

The author says everything that people do is as useless as if they were trying to control the wind. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “as useless as trying to control the wind” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:18

to the man who comes after me

Alternate translation: "to the man who inherits it after me"

Ecclesiastes 2:19

For who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that no one knows the character the man who will inherit his wealth. Alternate translation: "For no one knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

he will be

The word "he" refers to the author's heir.

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: "on the earth" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

that my work and wisdom have built

Here the author's "work" and "wisdom" represent himself and the things he did in his wisdom. He probably had help with the literal buildings. Alternate translation: "that I worked very hard and wisely to build" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

vapor

The author speaks of useless and meaningless things as if they were mist. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: "as useless as vapor" or "meaningless" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:20

my heart began to despair

Here the author refers to himself by his “heart” to emphasize his feelings. Alternate translation: “I began to despair” or “I began to lose all hope” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:21

who works with wisdom, with knowledge, and skill

Alternate translation: "who works wisely and skillfully, using the things that he has learned"

who has not made any of it

Alternate translation: "who has not worked for any of it"

vapor

The author speaks of useless and meaningless things as if they were mist. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: "as useless as vapor" or "meaningless" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

a great tragedy

Alternate translation: "a great disaster"

Ecclesiastes 2:22

For what profit does the person gain who works so hard and tries in his heart to complete his labors under the sun?

The author uses a rhetorical question to emphasize that the man who works hard gains nothing. Translate “what profit does ... gain” as you did in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “For the person who works so hard and tries in his heart to complete his labors under the sun gains nothing.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

works so hard and tries in his heart

These two phrases mean basically the same thing and emphasize how strenuously the person works. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

tries in his heart

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “tries anxiously” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:23

painful and stressful

These two words mean basically the same thing and emphasize how difficult the person's work is. (See: **Doublet (p. 259)**) (See: **Doublet (p.259)**)

his soul does not find rest

Here man's mind is referred to as his "soul" to emphasize his deep thoughts. Alternate translation: "his mind does not rest" or "he continues to worry" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:24

God's hand

Here God is represented by his "hand" to emphasize how he provides for people. Alternate translation: "from God"
(See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:25

For who can eat or who can have any kind of pleasure apart from God?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that no pleasure can be had without God's provision. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "For no one can eat or have any kind of pleasure apart from God." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 2:26

so that he may give it away to someone who pleases God

Possible meanings for the word **he** are: (1) God or (2) the sinner. This also can be translated without making it clear who it is that gives the things that the sinner stored. Alternate translation: “so that the one who pleases God may have it”

vapor & an attempt to shepherd the wind

These two phrases are both metaphors that emphasize the idea of things being useless and futile. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

vapor

“mist.” The author speaks of useless and meaningless things as if they were “vapor.” See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “as useless as vapor” or “meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

an attempt to shepherd the wind

The author speaks of everything that people do as being useless as if they were trying to control the wind. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “are as useless as trying to control the wind” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 3

Ecclesiastes 3 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations set each line of poetry farther to the right than the rest of the text to make it easier to read. The ULT does this with the poetry in 3:1-8 and 3:15.

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Parallelism

The chapter uses parallelism with the phrase, “a time to.” This gives the quotation a poetic style. Their overall purpose is to show that Yahweh directs the events of the world and therefore, they have purpose.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

General Information:

General Information:

The writer uses merisms to describe various aspects of life from one extreme to the other. (See: **Merism (p.278)**) (See: **Merism (p.278)**)

For everything there is an appointed time, and a season for every purpose

These two phrases mean basically the same thing and are combined for emphasis. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

under heaven

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 3:2

a time to pull up plants

This could mean: (1) "a time to harvest" or (2) "a time to uproot."

Ecclesiastes 3:3

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 3:4

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 3:5

embrace

to hold someone in your arms to show love or friendship

Ecclesiastes 3:6

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 3:7

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 3:8

General Information:

General Information:

The writer concludes using merisms to describe various aspects of life from one extreme to the other. (See: **Merism (p.278)**) (See: **Merism (p.278)**)

Ecclesiastes 3:9

What profit does the worker gain in his labor?

This is a thought provoking question to focus the reader on the next discussion topic. Translate “what profit does ... gain” as you did in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “The worker gains no profit for his labor.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 3:10

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 3:11

God has made everything suitable for its own time

“God has fixed a time that is right for everything to happen” or “God has set a time that is right for each thing to happen:

placed eternity in their hearts

Here the word “their” refers to human beings. Here the “hearts” of the people represent their thoughts and desires. Alternate translation: “placed eternity in the hearts of human beings” or “caused people to think about eternal things” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

from their beginning all the way to their end

This refers to the beginning and the end and all that is in between. (See: **Merism (p.278)**) (See: **Merism (p.278)**)

Ecclesiastes 3:12

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 3:13

should understand how to enjoy

Alternate translation: “should learn how to enjoy” or “should enjoy”

Ecclesiastes 3:14

Nothing can be added to it or taken away

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “No one can add anything to or take anything away from it” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 3:15

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 3:16

I have seen the wickedness & wickedness was there

These two phrases mean the same thing and emphasize how common wicked behavior is. (See: **Parallelism (p. 293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

in place of righteousness

Alternate translation: "where there should be righteousness"

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: "on the earth" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 3:17

I said in my heart

Here the author refers to himself by his “heart” to emphasize his feelings. Alternate translation: “I said to myself” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

the righteous and the wicked

This refers to righteous and wicked people. Alternate translation: “those who are righteous and those who are wicked” or “the righteous people and the wicked people” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.288)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.288)**)

every matter and every deed

These two phrases mean basically the same thing and refer to every action that people do. (See: **Doublet (p.259)**) (See: **Doublet (p.259)**)

Ecclesiastes 3:18

I said in my heart

Here the author refers to himself by his “heart” to emphasize his feelings. Alternate translation: “I said to myself” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

they are like animals

Here the author says that human beings are like animals. In the next verse the author explains clearly how humans are like animals. (See: **Simile (p.304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

Ecclesiastes 3:19

is the same fate for them

Alternate translation: "is the same for both of them" or "is the same"

The breath is the same for all of them

Alternate translation: "All of them breathe same"

There is no advantage for mankind over the animals

Alternate translation: "Mankind is no better off than the animals"

is not everything just a breath?

Here the author speaks of everything being as temporary as if it were a breath of air. The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that everything is temporary. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "Everything is just a breath." or "Everything is as temporary as a breath." (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 3:20

Everything is going to the same place

This means that all people and all animals die and decay and become part of the soil. Alternate translation: "Everything dies and goes to the same place" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

dust

soil

Ecclesiastes 3:21

Who knows whether the spirit & into the earth?

The author asks this rhetorical question to emphasize that no one truly knows what happens after people and animals die. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "No one knows whether the spirit ... into the earth." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 3:22

there is nothing better for anyone than to

See how you translated this phrase in [Ecclesiastes 3:12](#).

Who can bring him back to see what happens after him?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that no one will see what happens after he dies. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “No one of us knows what happens to us after we die.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 4

Ecclesiastes 4 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations set each line of poetry farther to the right than the rest of the text to make it easier to read. The ULT does this with the poetry in 4:1-3, 4:5-6, and 4:8-12.

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Irony

The teacher looks at the oppression in the world and is saddened by it, but he is the king and has the power to change things. He also laments being alone even though he has many wives, children, and concubines. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/other/oppress\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/lament\]\]](#) and **Irony (p.275)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:1

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

behold, the tears

Alternate translation: “I looked and I saw”

the tears of oppressed people

Here “tears” represent weeping. Alternate translation: “the oppressed people were weeping” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Power was in the hand of their oppressors

This means that their oppressors were powerful. Here their “hand” represents what they possess. Alternate translation: “Their oppressors were powerful” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:2

the living, who are still alive

The word “living” is a nominal adjective that refers to people who are living. The phrase “those who are still alive” means the same thing as “the living.” Alternate translation: “the people who are still alive” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#)) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-nominaladj\]\]](#)) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:3

more fortunate than both of them is the one who has not yet lived

Alternate translation: "the one who has not yet been born is better off than both of them"

both of them

This refers to those who are dead and to those who are alive. Alternate translation: "both those who are dead and those who are living" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: "on the earth" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:4

became the envy of one's neighbor

The word “envy” may be expressed as an adjective. Alternate translation: “made one’s neighbor envious” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

the envy of one's neighbor

This could mean: (1) The neighbor envies the object his neighbor made, or (2) the neighbor envies the skills his neighbor has.

vapor & an attempt to shepherd the wind

These two phrases are both metaphors that emphasize the idea of things being useless and futile. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

vapor

“mist.” The author speaks of things as being useless and meaningless as if they were vapor. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “as useless as vapor” or “meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

an attempt to shepherd the wind

The author speaks of everything that people do as being useless as if they were trying to control the wind. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “are as useless as trying to control the wind” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:5

The fool folds his hands and does not work

To fold the hands is a gesture of laziness and is another way of saying that the person refuses to work. Alternate translation: "The fool refuses to work" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/translate-symaction\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#)) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.307)**)

so his food is his own flesh

This speaks of a person destroying himself as if he were eating his own body. Alternate translation: "as a result, he causes his own ruin" or "and as a result, he destroys himself" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:6

a handful

Alternate translation: "a small amount"

two handfuls

"a large amount." It is understood that this refer to profit gained. Alternate translation: "two handfuls of profit" or "a large amount of profit" (See: **Ellipsis (p.261)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.261)**)

that tries to shepherd the wind

The author speaks of everything that people do as being useless as if they were trying to control the wind. See how you translated a similar phrase in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: "that is as useless as trying to control the wind" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:7

futility

being useless, without profit

more vanishing vapor

“more vanishing mist.” The author speaks of things as being useless and meaningless as if they were vapor. See how you translated “vapor” in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “more things that are as useless as vapor” or “more meaningless things” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

vapor

“mist.” The author speaks of things as being useless and meaningless as if they were vapor. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “as useless as vapor” or “meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:8

no son or brother

This person has no family. Alternate translation: “he has no family” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

his eyes are not satisfied

Here the whole person is represented by his “eyes” to emphasize his desires. Alternate translation: “he is not satisfied” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure

Alternate translation: “Will anyone benefit from me working hard and not enjoying myself”

Ecclesiastes 4:9

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 4:10

sorrow follows the one who is alone when he falls

Here sorrow is spoken of as if it were a person that could follow someone else. Alternate translation: “the one who is alone when he falls is sorrowful” (See: **Personification (p.296)**) (See: **Personification (p.296)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:11

If two lie down together, they can be warm

The writer speaks of two people keeping each other warm on a cold night. Alternate translation: "If two people lie down together at night, they can be warm" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

how can one be warm alone?

This refers to a person lying down. The author use this rhetorical question to emphasize that two people can keep each other warm but one person cannot. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "a person cannot be warm when he is alone." or "a person who lies down alone cannot be warm." (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-ellipsis\]\]](#)) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:12

One man alone can be overpowered

This can be written in active form. Alternate translation: "Someone can overpower a person who is alone" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

but two

Alternate translation: "but two people"

withstand an attack

Alternate translation: "defend themselves against an attack"

a three-strand rope

This speaks of three people together being stronger as if they were a three-strand rope. Alternate translation: "three people are even stronger, like a three-strand rope that" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

a three-strand rope is not quickly broken

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "people cannot easily break a rope made with three strands" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:13

wise youth

Alternate translation: “wise young man”

who no longer knows how

Here knowing represents willingness. Alternate translation: “who is no longer willing” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)
(See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:14

from prison

Alternate translation: "after being in prison"

he was born poor in his kingdom

This means that he had poor parents. Alternate translation: "he was born to poor parents who lived in the land that he will someday rule" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:15

General Information:

General Information:

Instead of choosing the wise youth, the people choose the king's son, who may not be any wiser.

alive & walking around

The words "alive" and "walking around" mean basically the same thing and are combined to emphasize living people. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: "on the earth" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 4:16

There is no end to all the people

This is an exaggeration used to emphasize a large number of people. Alternate translation: “There are very many people” (See: **Hyperbole (p.266)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.266)**)

vapor & an attempt to shepherd the wind

These two phrases are both metaphors that emphasize the idea of things being useless and futile. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

vapor

“mist.” The author speaks of things as being useless and meaningless as if they were vapor. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “as useless as vapor” or “meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

an attempt to shepherd the wind

The author speaks of everything that people do as being useless as if they were trying to control the wind. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “are as useless as trying to control the wind” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 5

Ecclesiastes 5 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations set each line of poetry farther to the right than the rest of the text to make it easier to read. The ULT does this with the poetry in 5:2-3, and 5:10-17.

Special concepts in this chapter

Materialism

The author describes the pointlessness of pursuing material things. This is known as “materialism.” Those who pursue after things will always want more. At the end of their life, they will not be able to use these things.

Ecclesiastes 5:1

Guard your steps

Here “steps” are a metonym for a person’s conduct. Alternate translation: “Be careful how you conduct yourself”
(See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:2

Do not be too quick & do not let your heart be too quick

These two phrases mean the same thing and emphasize that you should think first before you speak to God about a matter. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

to speak with your mouth

Here the phrase “with your mouth” emphasizes and describes a person speaking. Alternate translation: “to speak”

do not let your heart

Here a person is represented by his “heart” to emphasize his emotions and desires. Alternate translation: “do not” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

let your words be few

Alternate translation: “do not say too much”

Ecclesiastes 5:3

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 5:4

do not delay to do it, for God has no pleasure in fools

It is implied that it is foolish to delay in fulfilling a vow that you have made to God. Alternate translation: “do not foolishly delay in doing it, because God is not pleased with foolish people” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:5

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 5:6

Do not allow your mouth to cause your flesh to sin

Here a person's "mouth" represents a person's speech, and the person himself is represented by his "flesh."

Alternate translation: "Do not let what you say cause you to sin" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Why make God angry by vowing falsely, provoking God to destroy the work of your hands?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that it is foolish to make a vow that you will not keep. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "It would be foolish to make God angry by vowing falsely, provoking God to destroy the work of your hands." (See:

Rhetorical Question (p.301)) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

destroy the work of your hands

Here a person is represented by his "hands." Alternate translation: "destroy everything you do" (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:7

For in many dreams, as in many words, there is meaningless vapor

The author speaks of things as being useless and futile as if they were vapor. See how you translated “vapor” in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “For many dreams and many words are as useless as vapor” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:8

the poor being oppressed and robbed

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “people oppressing the poor and robbing them” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

the poor

This refers to poor people. Alternate translation: “those who are poor” or “poor people” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.288)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.288)**)

just and right treatment

The words “just” and “right” mean basically the same thing and refer to the kind of treatment that people deserve. Alternate translation: “fair treatment” (See: **Doublet (p.259)**) (See: **Doublet (p.259)**)

do not be astonished as if no one knows, because there are people

“do not be surprised, for there are people

there are people in power

Alternate translation: “there are people with authority”

even higher ones over them

There are other men who rule over the men in authority. Alternate translation: “men who have even more authority than they do” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:9

the produce of the land & produce from the fields

The word “produce” may be expressed as a verb. Alternate translation: “the food that the land produces ... crops from the fields” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:10

vapor

The author speaks of useless and meaningless things as if they were mist. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “as useless as vapor” or “meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:11

As prosperity increases

The word “prosperity” may be expressed as an adjective. Alternate translation: “As a person becomes more prosperous” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

so also do the people who consume it

This could mean: (1) “so also the person spends more money” or (2) “so also there will be more people who use his wealth.”

who consume it

This speaks of people spending wealth as if they were “eating” it. Alternate translation: “who use it” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

What advantage in wealth is there to the owner except to watch it with his eyes?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that the wealthy do not benefit from their wealth. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “The only benefit that the owner has from wealth is that he can look at it” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:12

The sleep of a working man is sweet

This speaks of a person's sleep being fulfilling and peaceful as if it were sweet like something he eats. Alternate translation: "The sleep of a working man is peaceful" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

whether he eats little or a lot

Alternate translation: "whether he eats a little bit of food or a lot of food"

but the wealth of a rich person does not allow him to sleep well

"but the wealth of a rich person keeps him awake at night." This speaks of a rich person not being able to sleep because he is worried about his money as if his money were a person that would not allow him to sleep. Alternate translation: "but rich people do not sleep well because they worry about their money" (See: **Personification (p.296)**) (See: **Personification (p.296)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:13

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

riches hoarded by the owner

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “an owner hoards riches” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:14

through bad luck

This could mean: (1) “through misfortune” or (2) “through a bad business deal.”

his own son, one whom he has fathered, is left with nothing in his hands

Here the phrase “in his hands” represents ownership. If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “he leaves no possession for his own son” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:15

As a man comes from his mother's womb & he will leave naked

It is implied that a man is naked when he is born. In addition to being without clothing, here the word "naked" emphasizes that people are born without any possessions. Alternate translation: "As a man is naked and owns nothing when he is born ... he will leave this life the same way" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

comes from his mother's womb

Alternate translation: "is born"

he will leave

This refers to dying. Alternate translation: "he will die" (See: **Euphemism (p.264)**) (See: **Euphemism (p.264)**)

He can take none of the fruits of his labor in his hand

Here a man's possessions are spoken of as if they are fruit that he grew with his labor. Alternate translation: "He can not take any of his possessions with him" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:16

as a person comes, so he goes away

This refers to the birth and death of a person and expresses the same idea as the previous verse. This refers to women as well as men. Alternate translation: “as people bring nothing into the world when they are born, so they take nothing with them when they die and leave this world” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-gendernotations\]\]](#)) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

So what profit is there for him who works for the wind?

The writer uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that there is no benefit in working for the wind. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “No one gets any profit in working for the wind.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

works for the wind

This could mean: (1) This speaks of the person receiving no lasting profit as if he were trying to control the wind. Alternate translation: “tries to shepherd the wind” or “work that is as useless as trying to shepherd the wind” or (2) This implies that the person only receives the air that he breathes as his profit. Alternate translation: “works to receive the air he breathes” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:17

During his days he eats with darkness

This speaks of a person mourning throughout his life as if he always ate in darkness. Here “darkness” represents sadness and mourning. Alternate translation: “He spends his life in mourning and sadness” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

his days

Here a person’s “days” represent his life. Alternate translation: “his life” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

is greatly distressed with sickness and anger

The words “sickness” and “anger” can be expressed as adjectives. Alternate translation: “suffers greatly, being sick and angry” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

Ecclesiastes 5:18

Look

The author uses this word here to draw his reader's attention to what he says next. Alternate translation: "Pay attention" or "Listen" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

what I have seen to be good and suitable

Here the words "good" and "suitable" mean basically the same thing. The second intensifies the meaning of the first. Alternate translation: "what I have seen to be the best thing to do" (See: **Doublet (p.259)**) (See: **Doublet (p.259)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: "on the earth" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

during the days of this life that God has given us

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: "as long as God allows us to live" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

For this is man's assignment

This could mean: (1) "For this is man's reward" or (2) "For these are the things that he allows man to do"

Ecclesiastes 5:19

riches and wealth

These two words mean basically the same thing. They refer to money and the things that a person can buy with money. (See: **Doublet (p.259)**) (See: **Doublet (p.259)**)

to receive his share

Alternate translation: "to accept what he is given"

Ecclesiastes 5:20

he does not call to mind

Here the word "he" refers to the person to whom God has given a gift. The phrase "call to mind" is an idiom. Alternate translation: "he does not remember" or "he does not think about" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

the days of his life

This refers to the things that happened during his lifetime. This can be stated clearly. Alternate translation: "the things that have happened during his lifetime" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

keep busy

Alternate translation: "stay busy"

Ecclesiastes 6

Ecclesiastes 6 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations set each line of poetry farther to the right than the rest of the text to make it easier to read. The ULT does this with the poetry in 6:7-11.

Special concepts in this chapter

Satisfaction

While a person may be given a great many things, they are worthless and provide no sense of satisfaction or peace. It is assumed that only Yahweh can provide these things to man. Solomon is depressed that he had everything he could have ever wanted in life, but they were not enough to give him satisfaction or peace. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

Ecclesiastes 6:1

it weighs heavy on men

Here evil is spoken of as something that is a heavy load to carry. Alternate translation: "it causes hardship for people" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 6:2

riches, wealth

These two words mean basically the same thing. They refer to money and the things that a person can buy with money. (See: **Doublet (p.259)**) (See: **Doublet (p.259)**)

he lacks nothing

This is a double negative. Alternate translation: “he has everything” (See: **Double Negatives (p.256)**) (See: **Double Negatives (p.256)**)

God gives him no ability

Alternate translation: “does not give him the ability”

vapor

The author speaks of useless and meaningless things as if they were mist. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “as useless as vapor” or “meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 6:3

fathers a hundred children

“fathers 100 children.” This is a hypothetical situation. This is also an exaggeration and is applicable to people with fewer than 100 children. Alternate translation: “fathers many children” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/translate-numbers\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-hypo\]\]](#) and **Hyperbole (p.266)**) (See: **Numbers (p.290)**)

lives many years, so that the days of his years are many

These two phrases mean basically the same thing and are combined for emphasis. Alternate translation: “lives many years” (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

his heart is not satisfied with good

This refers to a man by his “heart” to emphasize his feelings. Alternate translation: “he is not content with good things” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

he is not buried

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. This could mean: (1) “no one buries him at all” or (2) he receives no honor, “no one buries him properly.” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#) or [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#)) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 6:4

such a baby is born in futility

Alternate translation: "such a baby is born for nothing"

passes away in darkness

This speaks of the death of the baby being as unexplainable as "darkness." Alternate translation: "dies unexplainably" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

its name remains hidden

This speaks of no one knowing the baby's name as if it were a hidden object. Alternate translation: "no one knows its name" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 6:5

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 6:6

Even if a man should live for two thousand years

This is a hypothetical situation. This is also an exaggeration to show that it does not matter how long a person lives if he does not enjoy the good things in life. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-hypo\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-hyperbole\]\]](#)) (See: **Hypothetical Situations (p.270)**)

two thousand years

"2,000 years" (See: **Numbers (p.290)**) (See: **Numbers (p.290)**)

he goes to the same place as everyone else

This means that he dies like all other people. Alternate translation: "he dies and go to the same place as everyone else" or "he goes to the grave just like everyone else" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p. 251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

Ecclesiastes 6:7

is for his mouth

Here putting food in a man's mouth represents feeding him. Alternate translation: "is to put food in his mouth" or "is to feed him" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

his appetite is not satisfied

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "he does not satisfy his appetite" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 6:8

what advantage has the wise person over the fool?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that a wise person does not have any more lasting benefits than a fool. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "it seems the wise person has no advantage over the fool." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

What advantage does the poor man have even if he knows how to act in front of other people?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that a poor man does not have any more lasting benefits than someone else. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "The poor man has no advantage even if he knows how to act in front of other people." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

how to act

Alternate translation: "how to conduct himself"

Ecclesiastes 6:9

what the eyes see

A person can see these things because he already has them. Alternate translation: “what a person has” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

to desire what a wandering appetite craves

This refers to things that a person wants but does not have. Alternate translation: “to want what he does not have” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

vapor & an attempt to shepherd the wind

These two phrases are both metaphors that emphasize the idea of things being useless and futile. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

vapor

“mist.” The author speaks of things as being useless and meaningless as if they were vapor. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “as useless as vapor” or “meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

an attempt to shepherd the wind

The author speaks of everything that people do as being useless as if they were trying to control the wind. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “are as useless as trying to control the wind” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 6:10

Whatever has existed has already been given its name

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "People have already named everything that exists" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

what mankind is like has already been known

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "people already know what mankind is like" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

the one who is the mighty judge

Alternate translation: "God, who is the mighty judge"

Ecclesiastes 6:11

The more words that are spoken

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “The more words that people speak” (See: **Active or Passive (p. 246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

the more futility increases

The more a person speaks, the more likely he will speak about meaningless things. Alternate translation: “the more meaningless those words are”

futility

being useless, without profit

what advantage is that to a man?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that there is no advantage for a man to talk a lot. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “that is no advantage to a man.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 6:12

For who knows what is good for man & he passes like a shadow?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that no person truly knows what is good for man. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “No one knows what is good for man ... he passes like a shadow.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

in his life during his futile, numbered days through which he passes like a shadow

This speaks of how life passes quickly by saying that it is like a shadow that quickly disappears. The phrase “numbered days” emphasizes that a person’s life is short. Alternate translation: “during his futile, short life, which he passes through as quickly as a shadow passes by” (See: **Simile (p.304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

Who can tell a man & after he passes?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that no one knows what will happen after a person dies. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “No one can tell a man ... after he passes.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

what will come under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated “under the sun” in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “what will happen on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

after he passes

This is a polite expression for death. Alternate translation: “after he dies” (See: **Euphemism (p.264)**) (See: **Euphemism (p.264)**)

Ecclesiastes 7

Ecclesiastes 7 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations set each line of poetry farther to the right than the rest of the text to make it easier to read. The ULT does this with the poetry in 7:1-26.

Special concepts in this chapter

Advice

This chapter gives a series of disconnected pieces of advice. Translators should not try to smooth the transitions between these pieces of advice. The advice in these statements do not apply in every situation. Therefore, they should be seen as “good ideas.”

Ecclesiastes 7:1

A good name

Here a person's "name" is used to represent their reputation. Alternate translation: "A good reputation" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:2

must take this to heart

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “must think seriously about this” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:3

sadness of face

This refers to being sad. Alternate translation: “an experience that makes a person sad” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

gladness of heart

Here, the word **heart** refers to a person’s thoughts and emotions. **Gladness** describes either: (1) the state of the emotions of being happy and peaceful or (2) the ability to understand the truth. Alternate translation: “right thinking” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:4

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning

Here wise people are referred to by their “hearts.” This speaks of the wise person mourning as being in a house of mourning. Alternate translation: “Wise people think deeply about death” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

but the heart of fools is in the house of feasting

Here foolish people are referred to by their “hearts.” This speaks of foolish people thinking only about what makes them happy as being in a house of feasting. Alternate translation: “but foolish people think only about enjoying themselves” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

the house of mourning & the house of feasting

These phrases refer to what happens in these places.

Ecclesiastes 7:5

to the rebuke of the wise

The word “rebuke” can be expressed as a verb. Alternate translation: “when wise people rebuke you” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

to listen to the song of fools

Alternate translation: “to listen to fools sing”

Ecclesiastes 7:6

For like the crackling of thorns burning under a pot, so also is the laughter of fools

This speaks of how listening to fools talk and laugh will teach you nothing, as if their speech and laughter were the sound of burning thorns. Alternate translation: "For listening to the laughter of fools will not teach a man any more than if he were listening to the crackling of thorns burning under a pot" (See: **Simile (p.304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

vapor

The author speaks of useless and meaningless things as if they were mist. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: "as useless as vapor" or "meaningless" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:7

Extortion

This refers to forcing someone to give money or other valuable items to another so that the other person does not harm him. It is considered wrong.

makes a wise man foolish

This could mean: (1) “turns the wise man into a foolish man” or (2) “makes the advice of the wise man appear to be foolish advice.”

corrupts the heart

Here the word “heart” refers to the mind. Alternate translation: “ruins a person’s ability to think and judge rightly” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:8

the people patient in spirit are better than the proud in spirit

Here the word “spirit” refers to a person’s attitude. Alternate translation: “patient people are better than proud people” or “a patient attitude is better than a prideful attitude” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:9

Do not be quick to anger in your spirit

Here the word “spirit” refers to a person’s attitude. Alternate translation: “Do not become angry quickly” or “Do not have a bad temper” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

anger resides in the hearts of fools

This speaks of a person being full of anger as if the anger lived inside him. This speaks of the anger being in the person’s heart because the “heart” is thought to be the source of a person’s emotions. Alternate translation: “foolish people are full of anger” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:10

Why were the days of old better than these?

The person asks this rhetorical question in order to complain about the present time. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "Things were better in the past than they are now." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

it is not because of wisdom that you ask this question

Here the author uses irony to rebuke the person's question. Alternate translation: "if you were wise you would not ask this question" (See: **Irony (p.275)**) (See: **Irony (p.275)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:11

those who see the sun

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “those who are alive” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:12

the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom gives life

This could mean: (1) that the writer uses the words “knowledge” and “wisdom” to mean the same thing, or (2) “the advantage of knowing wisdom is that it gives life.”

gives life to whoever has it

This speaks of how wisdom helps to preserve a person's life as if it gave life to that person. When a person is wise he makes good decisions that help him to live a more prosperous and longer life. Alternate translation: “preserves a person's life” or “helps a person to make good decisions and to live a longer life” (See: **Personification (p.296)**) (See: **Personification (p.296)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:13

Who can straighten out anything he has made crooked?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that no one can change something that God has done. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “No one can straighten out anything he has made crooked.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:14

When times are good & when times are bad

The word “times” is an idiom for “things happening.” Alternate translation: “When good things happen ... when bad things happen” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

live happily in that good

Alternate translation: “be happy about those good things”

both to exist side by side

The phrase “side by side” is an idiom that means “this one” and “this one.” Alternate translation: “both to exist” or “there to be both good and bad” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

anything that is coming after him

This could mean: (1) “anything that happens in the future” or (2) “anything that happens to him after he dies.”

Ecclesiastes 7:15

in my meaningless days

Alternate translation: "in my meaningless life"

in spite of their righteousness

Alternate translation: "even though they are righteous"

in spite of their evil

Alternate translation: "even though they are evil"

Ecclesiastes 7:16

self-righteous, wise in your own eyes

These two phrases mean basically the same thing and are combined for emphasis. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

Do not be self-righteous

Alternate translation: "Do not think that you are more righteous than you actually are"

wise in your own eyes

The eyes represent seeing, and seeing represents thoughts or judgment. Alternate translation: "being wise in your own opinion" or "being wise according to your own judgement" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Why should you destroy yourself?

The writer uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that being self-righteous destroys a person. Alternate translation: "There is no reason to destroy yourself." or "If you think this way you will destroy yourself." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:17

Why should you die before your time?

The author uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that there is no reason for people to do things that will cause them to die early. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "There is no reason for you to die sooner than you should." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p. 301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:18

take hold of this wisdom

This speaks of striving to be wise as if "wisdom" were an object that a person could hold on to. Alternate translation: "commit yourself to this wisdom" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

you should not let go of righteousness

This speaks of striving to be righteous as if "righteousness" were an object that a person could hold on to. Alternate translation: "you should not stop trying to be righteous" or "you should keep trying to be righteous" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

will meet all his obligations

Alternate translation: "will do everything that God expects of him"

Ecclesiastes 7:19

Wisdom is powerful in the wise man, more than ten rulers in a city

Alternate translation: "Wisdom makes a man powerful; it makes him more powerful than ten rulers in a city"

Ecclesiastes 7:20

does good and never sins

Alternate translation: "does good things and does not sin"

Ecclesiastes 7:21

every word that is spoken

This can be written in active form. Alternate translation: “everything that people say” (See: **Active or Passive (p. 246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:22

you know yourself

“you yourself know.” Here “yourself” is used to emphasize the phrase “you know.” (See: **Reflexive Pronouns (p.298)**) (See: **Reflexive Pronouns (p.298)**)

in your own heart

Here a person’s thoughts are represented by their “heart.” Alternate translation: “in your own thoughts” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:23

All this have I proven

here the word “this” refers to all of the things the author has written about. Alternate translation: “All this that I have already written about have I proven” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

it was more than I could be

Alternate translation: “it was beyond my ability to understand” or “but I was not able to do it”

Ecclesiastes 7:24

far off and very deep

This speaks of wisdom being difficult to understand as if it were something located far away or in a very deep place. Alternate translation: "difficult to understand" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Who can find it?

The writer uses this rhetorical question to emphasize the difficulty in understanding wisdom. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "No one can understand it." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:25

I turned my heart

Here the word "heart" refers to the mind. Also, here the word "turned" is an idiom. Alternate translation: "I directed my thoughts" or "I determined" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

the explanations of reality

"the reason for things." This word "explanations" can be expressed as a verb. Alternate translation: "how to explain various things in life" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:26

any woman whose heart is full of snares and nets, and whose hands are chains

The writer says that the seductive woman is like traps that hunters use to catch animals. The author speaks of a woman being seductive as if she traps men like a hunter traps animals. Her “heart” represents her thoughts and emotions. Alternate translation: “any woman who traps men by seducing them” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

snares and nets

These two words both refer to ways in which people trap animals to emphasize how the woman traps men. (See: **Doublet (p.259)**) (See: **Doublet (p.259)**)

whose hands are chains

Here the word “hands” refers to her power and control. This speaks of her being seductive as if hands were chains that she bound people with. Alternate translation: “from whom no one can escape” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

the sinner will be taken by her

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “she will capture the sinner” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:27

adding one discovery to another

The word “discovery” can be expressed as a verb. The word “adding” here is used as an idiom. Alternate translation: “discovering one thing after another” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#)) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

in order to find an explanation of reality

This word “explanation” can be expressed as a verb. See how the phrase “explanations of reality” is translated in [Ecclesiastes 7:25](#). Alternate translation: “in order to be able to explain things in life” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

Ecclesiastes 7:28

one righteous man among a thousand

"1 righteous man among 1,000." Only one righteous man was found in a group of 1,000 people. (See: **Numbers (p. 290)**) (See: **Numbers (p.290)**)

a woman among all those

There were no righteous women found in a group of 1,000 people.

Ecclesiastes 7:29

they have gone away looking for many difficulties

This could mean: (1) “they have made many sinful plans” or (2) “they have made their own lives difficult.”

they have gone away

Here the word “they” refers to “humanity.” This speaks of humanity changing from being upright to not being upright as if they were going from one place to another. (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 8

Ecclesiastes 8 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations set each line of poetry farther to the right than the rest of the text to make it easier to read. The ULT does this with the poetry in 8:1 and 8:5-8.

Special concepts in this chapter

Wisdom

Solomon, known for his wisdom, gives a detailed description of wisdom. True wisdom is seeking to honor God. This is the only thing that lasts. (See: **wise, wisdom (p.319)**)

Ecclesiastes 8:1

Who is a wise man? Who knows what the events in life mean?

The writer asks these as leading questions to provide the answer in what he says next.

causes his face to shine

This means that the person's face will show that he has wisdom. Alternate translation: "shows on his face" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

the hardness of his face

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: "his harsh appearance" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

is changed

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "changes" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 8:2

God's oath to protect him

Alternate translation: "the oath you made before God to protect him"

Ecclesiastes 8:3

Do not hurry out of his presence

This could mean: (1) not to be hasty to physically leave the king's presence or (2) This is a metaphor that speaks of being loyal to the king as being in his presence. Alternate translation: "Do not abandon the king" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 8:4

The king's word rules

Alternate translation: "What the king says is the law"

who will say to him

This rhetorical question emphasizes that no one will ask the king the following question. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "no one can say to him" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

What are you doing?

This rhetorical question is a rebuke. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "You should not be doing what you are doing." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 8:5

A wise man's heart recognizes

Here a man is represented by his "heart" to emphasize his thoughts. Alternate translation: "A wise man recognizes"
(See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

the proper course and time of action

Alternate translation: "the correct time to do things and the right way to do them"

Ecclesiastes 8:6

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 8:7

Who can tell him what is coming?

This rhetorical question emphasizes that no one knows what will happen in the future. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "No one can tell him what is coming." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 8:8

No one is ruler over his breath so as to stop the breath & no one has power over the day of his death

Just as no one has the ability to stop himself from breathing, no one can continue living when it is time to die. (See: **Simile (p.304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

No one is ruler

The word “ruler” can be expressed as a verb. Alternate translation: “No one has control”

the day of his death

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “when he will die” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

No one is discharged from the army

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: “No army discharges anyone” or “No army allows soldiers to leave” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

wickedness will not rescue those who are its slaves

This speaks of wickedness as if it were a master who had slaves. Alternate translation: “evil people will not be saved by doing what is evil” (See: **Personification (p.296)**) (See: **Personification (p.296)**)

Ecclesiastes 8:9

I have applied my heart

Here the author refers to himself by his “heart” to emphasize his feelings. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:17](#). Alternate translation: “I applied myself” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

every kind of work that is done

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “every kind of work that people do” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

There is a time when a person oppresses another person to that person's hurt

Alternate translation: “Sometimes one person will oppress another, causing that person to be hurt”

Ecclesiastes 8:10

the wicked buried publicly

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Evil people that died were given honorable burials. Alternate translation: “people bury the wicked publicly” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

They were taken from the holy area and buried and were praised by people

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “People took them from the holy area and buried them and praised them” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 8:11

When a sentence against an evil crime is not executed quickly

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “When people in authority do not quickly execute a sentence against an evil crime” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

entices the hearts of human beings

Here people are represented by their “hearts” to emphasize their will and desires. Alternate translation: “entices human beings” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

Ecclesiastes 8:12

a hundred times

“100 times” (See: **Numbers (p.290)**) (See: **Numbers (p.290)**)

it will be better for those who respect God

The phrase “it will be better” is an idiom. Alternate translation: “life will be better for those who respect God” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

who respect God & who stand before him and show him respect

These two phrases mean basically the same thing and are combined to emphasize people respecting God. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

Ecclesiastes 8:13

his life will not be prolonged

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “God will not prolong his life” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

His days are like a fleeting shadow

This speaks of how the wicked man’s life passes quickly by saying that it is like a shadow that quickly disappears. Alternate translation: “His days will pass as quickly as a shadow disappears” (See: **Simile (p.304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

His days are

Alternate translation: “His life is”

Ecclesiastes 8:14

something else that is done on the earth

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “something else that people do on the earth” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

this also is useless vapor

“this also is useless mist.” The author speaks of things as being useless and meaningless as if they were ‘vapor.’ See how you translated the word “vapor” in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “this also is as useless as vapor” or “this also is meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 8:15

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

for all the days of his life that God has given him

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “for as long as God allows him to live” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 8:16

I applied my heart

Here the author refers to himself by his “heart” to emphasize his feelings. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:17](#). Alternate translation: “I applied myself” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

the work that is done on the earth

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “the work that people do on the earth” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

without sleep for the eyes

Here a person is represented by his “eyes.” Alternate translation: “without sleeping” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

Ecclesiastes 8:17

the work that is done under the sun

This could mean: (1) “the work that God does under the sun” or (2) “the work that God allows people to do under the sun.” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 9

Ecclesiastes 9 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations set each line of poetry farther to the right than the rest of the text to make it easier to read. The ULT does this with the poetry in 9:2, 5-6, and 11-12.

Special concepts in this chapter

Judgment

This chapter explains that there is one thing that awaits all people: judgment. When people die, they will all face Yahweh's judgment. (See: **judge, judgment (p.317)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:1

I thought about all this in my mind

Alternate translation: "I thought very deeply about all this"

They are all in God's hands

Here the word "they" refers to "the righteous and wise people" as well as "their deeds."

in God's hands

Here the word "hands" refers to power and authority. Alternate translation: "under God's control" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

whether love or hate will come to someone

This speaks of "love" and "hate" as if they are people that may come to visit someone else. Alternate translation: "whether someone will experience love or hate" (See: **Personification (p.296)**) (See: **Personification (p.296)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:2

righteous people and wicked

This refers to all people, emphasizing the two opposites of righteous and wicked people. (See: **Merism (p.278)**) (See: **Merism (p.278)**)

wicked & the good & the clean and the unclean

All of these phrases refer to people. Alternate translation: “wicked people ... good people ... clean people and unclean people” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.288)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.288)**)

the clean and the unclean

This refers to all people, emphasizing the two opposites of clean and unclean people. (See: **Merism (p.278)**) (See: **Merism (p.278)**)

the clean

A person who is acceptable for God’s purposes is spoken of as if the person were physically clean. (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

the unclean

A person who is not acceptable for God’s purposes is spoken of as if the person were physically unclean. (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

the one who sacrifices and the one who does not sacrifice

This refers to all people, emphasizing the two opposites of those who sacrifice and those who do not. (See: **Merism (p.278)**) (See: **Merism (p.278)**)

As good people & so also will the sinner

This refers to all people, emphasizing the two opposites of good people and sinners. (See: **Merism (p.278)**) (See: **Merism (p.278)**)

will the sinner & will the man who fears to make an oath

It is understood that this refers to people dying. Alternate translation: “the sinner will die ... the man who fears to make an oath will die” (See: **Ellipsis (p.261)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.261)**)

the one who swears & so also will the man who fears to make an oath

This refers to all people, emphasizing the two opposites of those who swear oaths and those who do not. (See: **Merism (p.278)**) (See: **Merism (p.278)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:3

everything that is done

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “everything that happens” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

the same event

death

The hearts of human beings are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts

Here the word “hearts” refers to the thoughts and emotions. Alternate translation: “Human beings are full of evil, and their thoughts are of madness” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

madness

Alternate translation: “folly”

they go to the dead

The phrase “the dead” refers to dead people. Here dead people represent the place where people go after they die. Alternate translation: “they go to the place where dead people are” or “they die and go to the grave” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-nominaladj\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.288)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:4

the living

This refers to people who are alive. Alternate translation: “who are alive” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.288)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.288)**)

just as a living dog is better than a dead lion

A “dog” was considered a lowly animal while a lion was considered a noble animal. This speaks of it being better to be lowly and alive than to be considered noble and dead. Alternate translation: “It is better to be lowly like a dog and to be alive than to be noble like a lion and to be dead” (See: **Simile (p.304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:5

the dead

This refers to people who are dead. Alternate translation: “those who are dead” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.288)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.288)**)

their memory is forgotten

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “people will forget them” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:6

Their love, hatred, and envy

This refers to the love, hatred, and envy that the dead people showed others when they were alive.

anything done

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “anything that people do” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:7

eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart

These two phrases share similar meanings and emphasize the importance of enjoying the basic activities of life. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

your bread

This refers to food in general. Alternate translation: "your food" (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

drink your wine with a happy heart

Here the word "heart" refers to the emotions. Alternate translation: "drink your wine joyfully" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:8

Let your clothes be always white and your head anointed with oil

Wearing white clothes and anointing one's head with oil were both signs of gladness and celebration. (See: **Symbolic Action (p.307)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.307)**)

your head anointed with oil

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "anoint your head with oil" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:9

Live happily with the wife whom you love

One should love the wife he has. Alternate translation: "Since you have a wife whom you love, live happily with her" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: "on the earth" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

your days

Alternate translation: "your lifetime"

That is your reward

The word "that" refers to living happily with his wife.

Ecclesiastes 9:10

Whatever your hand finds to do

Here a person is represented by his “hand” since a person often uses his hands to work. Alternate translation: “Whatever you are able to do” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

there is no work or explanation or knowledge or wisdom

The nouns “work,” “explanation,” and “knowledge” can be expressed as verbs. Alternate translation: “the dead do not work or explain or know or have wisdom” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:11

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

The race does not belong to & The battle does not belong to

Alternate translation: “The race is not always won by ... The battle is not always won by”

Bread

Here “Bread” refers to food in general. Alternate translation: “Food” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

time and chance affect them all

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “what happens and when it happens affect them all” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

affect them all

“affects all these things.” Here the words “them all” refer to race, battle, bread, riches, and favor.

Ecclesiastes 9:12

when his time will come

This refers to when a person dies. Alternate translation: “when he will die” or “when the time of his death will come” (See: **Euphemism (p.264)**) (See: **Euphemism (p.264)**)

fish are caught & birds are caught & the children of human beings are ensnared

This speaks of people dying when they do not expect it, in the same way that people catch animals and kill them when they do not expect it. (See: **Simile (p.304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

the children of human beings are ensnared by evil times

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Also, this speaks of people experiencing disaster and unfortunate times as if they were being imprisoned or trapped. Alternate translation: “evil times are coming upon the children of human beings” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

that suddenly fall upon them

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “at times when they do not expect them to happen” or “that suddenly happen to them” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:13

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:14

a great king came against it

Here the "king" represents himself and his whole army. Alternate translation: "a great king and his army" (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

great siege ramps

This refers to dirt ramps the army built up against the city wall so that they could climb up and attack the city.

Ecclesiastes 9:15

in the city was found a poor, wise man

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “in the city, people found a poor, wise man” or “a poor, wise man lived in the city” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#)) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:16

the poor man's wisdom is despised

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "people despise the poor man's wisdom" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

his words are not heard

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "they do not listen to what he says" or "they do not take his advice" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:17

The words of wise people spoken quietly are heard better

Here “heard” represents understanding. If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “It is easier to understand the words that wise people speak quietly” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p. 246)**)

Ecclesiastes 9:18

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Ecclesiastes 10

Ecclesiastes 10 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations set each line of poetry farther to the right than the rest of the text to make it easier to read. The ULT does this with the poetry in all of chapter 10.

Special concepts in this chapter

Advice

This chapter gives a series of disconnected pieces of advice. Translators should not try to smooth the transitions between these pieces of advice. The advice in these statements do not apply in every situation. Therefore, they should be seen as “good ideas.”

Ecclesiastes 10:1

As dead flies & so a little folly

Just as flies can ruin perfume, so folly can ruin a person's reputation for wisdom and honor. This speaks of how a little folly can ruin a person's reputation in the same way that a few dead flies ruin perfume. (See: **Simile (p.304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

a little folly can overpower wisdom and honor

This speaks of how a person acting foolishly can ruin his reputation as if his "folly" and "wisdom and honor" were people and that his folly overpowered his wisdom and honor. Alternate translation: "committing a little folly can ruin a person's wisdom and honor" (See: **Personification (p.296)**) (See: **Personification (p.296)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:2

The heart of a wise person & the heart of a fool

Here the word “heart” refers to the mind or will. Alternate translation: “The way a wise person thinks ... the way a fool thinks” (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

tends to the right & tends to the left

Here the words “right” and “left” refer to what is right and wrong. Alternate translation: “tends to doing what is right ... tends to doing what is wrong” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:3

his thinking is deficient

This refers to the way that he acts. Alternate translation: “he is stupid” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:4

If the emotions of a ruler rise up against you

Here a ruler is represented by his "emotions" Alternate translation: "If a ruler becomes angry with you" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Calm can quiet down great outrage

Alternate translation: "By remaining calm you may cause an outraged person to become quiet"

Ecclesiastes 10:5

under the sun

This refers to things that are done on earth. See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#). Alternate translation: “on the earth” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:6

Fools are given leadership positions

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "Rulers give positions of leadership to fools" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

successful men are given low positions

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "they give low positions to successful men" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

low positions

This is an idiom. AT "unimportant positions" (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:7

successful men walking like slaves on the ground

This speaks of successful men walking like slaves walk, because slaves were usually forced to walk and were not permitted to ride. (See: **Simile (p.304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:8

a snake can bite him

This refers to a snake that was hiding inside the wall. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p. 251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:9

cuts out stones

This refers working in a quarry and cutting larger stones.

can be hurt by them

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “those stones can hurt him” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

is endangered by it

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “the wood may injure him” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:10

wisdom provides an advantage for success

A wise person would have sharpened his blade and would not have had to work so hard.

Ecclesiastes 10:11

before it is charmed

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “before the snake charmer charms it” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:12

The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious

Here the wise man's speech is represented by his "mouth." Alternate translation: "The things that a wise man says are gracious" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

the lips of a fool consume him

Here the fool's speech is represented by his "lips." This speaks of the fool destroying himself by his speech as if it were eating him. Alternate translation: "The things that a foolish man says destroy him" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:13

As words begin to flow from a fool's mouth

A fool's speech is represented by his "mouth." Alternate translation: "As a fool begins to speak" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

at the end his mouth flows with wicked madness

A fool's speech is represented by his "mouth." Alternate translation: "as he finishes talking, he speaks wicked madness" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:14

multiplies words

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “keeps on talking” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

what is coming

Alternate translation: “what will happen in the future”

Who knows what is coming after him?

The writer asks this question to emphasize that no one knows what will happen in the future after one's death. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “No one knows what is coming after him.” or “No one knows what will happen after he dies.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.301)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:15

wearies them

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "Fools become weary by their toil" or "Fools feel tired by the work that they do" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

so that they do not even know the road to town

This could mean: (1) "so much that he is unable to find the road to town." That the foolish person becomes so tired from working too hard that he is unable to find his way anywhere, or (2) "because he does not even know the way to town." That the foolish person becomes tired from working too hard because he does not know enough to go home.

Ecclesiastes 10:16

Woe to you, land

The writer is speaking to the people of the nation as if they were the land itself, and he is speaking to the land as if it were a person. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-apostrophe\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#)) (See: **Apostrophe (p.249)**)

if your king is a young boy

This means that the king is inexperienced or immature.

begin feasting in the morning

This implies that the leaders are more concerned with having a good time than with leading the nation. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:17

blessed are you, land

The writer is speaking to the people of the nation as if they were the land itself, and he is speaking to the land as if it were a person. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-apostrophe\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#)) (See: **Apostrophe (p.249)**)

king is the son of nobles

This implies that the son has been trained by his elders in the customs of being a good king. Alternate translation: “king has trained by nobles” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

for strength, and not for drunkenness

This explains why the blessed leaders eat.

Ecclesiastes 10:18

Because of laziness the roof sinks in

A lazy person does not keep up on the regular house maintenance. Alternate translation: "Because a lazy person does not repair his house, the roof sinks in" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

because of idle hands

Here a person is represented by his "hands" Alternate translation: "because of an idle person" or "because the person is idle" (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

the house leaks

Here the roof is represented by the whole house. Alternate translation: "the roof leaks" (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

Ecclesiastes 10:19

People prepare food for laughter

The word “laughter” can be expressed as a verb. Alternate translation: “People prepare food in order to laugh” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

wine brings enjoyment to life

The word “enjoyment” can be expressed as a verb. Alternate translation: “wine helps people to enjoy life” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

money fills the need for everything

This could mean: (1) “money provides for every need” or (2) “money provides for both food and wine”

Ecclesiastes 10:20

not even in your mind

A person's thoughts are represented by the person's "mind." Alternate translation: "not even in your thoughts" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

rich people in your bedroom

"rich people when you are in your bedroom." This means that you should not curse rich people even when you are in a private place where no one else will hear.

For a bird of the sky & can spread the matter

These two lines mean basically the same thing and are combined for emphasis. This speaks of people finding out what you have said as if a small bird would hear what you say and tell other people. Alternate translation: "For a bird may hear what you say and tell the matter to other people" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

Ecclesiastes 11

Ecclesiastes 11 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations set each line of poetry farther to the right than the rest of the text to make it easier to read. The ULT does this with the poetry in all of chapter 11.

Special concepts in this chapter

Advice

This chapter gives a series of disconnected pieces of advice. Translators should not try to smooth the transitions between these pieces of advice. The advice in these statements do not apply in every situation. Therefore, they should be seen as “good ideas.”

Ecclesiastes 11:1

Send out your bread on the waters, for you will find it again after many days

This could mean: (1) this is a metaphor that means a person should be generous with his possessions and will then receive generously from others , or (2) that a person should invest his resources overseas and will make a profit from it. (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 11:2

Share it with seven, even eight people

This could mean: (1) to share your possessions with many people, or (2) to invest your resources in multiple places.

seven, even eight people

"7, even 8 people." This is an idiom that means "numerous" people. Alternate translation: "numerous people" or "multiple people" (See: [\[rc:///ta/man/translate/translate-numbers\]](#) and [\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]](#)) (See: **Numbers (p.290)**)

what disasters are coming on the earth

Disasters happening is spoken of as if disasters were something that come to a place. Here "on the earth" may imply that these disasters happen to the person who is commanded to share. Alternate translation: "what disasters may happen in the world" or "what bad things may happen to you" (See: [\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]](#) and [\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 11:3

the clouds are full of rain

Alternate translation: "the clouds are dark with rain"

empty themselves on the earth

Alternate translation: "empty themselves on the ground"

toward the south or toward the north

Here "south" and "north" represent any direction. Alternate translation: "in any direction" (See: **Merism (p.278)**)
(See: **Merism (p.278)**)

Ecclesiastes 11:4

Anyone who watches the wind might not plant

This could mean: (1) "Any farmer who pays attention to the wind will not plant when the wind is blowing in the wrong direction" or (2) "Any farmer who pays too much attention to the wind will never plant"

anyone who watches the clouds might not harvest

This could mean: (1) "Any farmer who pays attention to the clouds will not harvest when it is about to rain" or (2) "Any farmer who pays too much attention to the clouds will never harvest"

Ecclesiastes 11:5

As you do not know the path of the wind

This speaks of wind blowing as if wind traveled on a path. Alternate translation: “As you do not know where the wind comes from or where it goes” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

how a baby’s bones grow

This could mean: (1) Here “bones” is a synecdoche representing the baby as a whole. Alternate translation: “how a baby grows” or (2) literally, “how the bones of a baby grow” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

Ecclesiastes 11:6

work with your hands

Here “hands” represents the whole person. Alternate translation: “keep on working” (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

whether morning or evening, or this or that

These two phrases mean basically the same thing and emphasize that the person’s work may prosper, no matter what time he has done it. Alternate translation: “whether the seed that you planted in the morning or the seed that you planted in the evening” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-doublet\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-ellipsis\]\]](#)) (See: **Doublet (p.259)**)

Ecclesiastes 11:7

light is sweet

Here the word "light" refers to being able to see the sun and therefore being alive. And, this speaks of the joy of being alive as if the light had a sweet taste. Alternate translation: "it is a joy to be able to see the sun" or "being alive is delightful" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

for the eyes to see the sun

The "eyes" represent the whole person. This phrase means basically the same thing as the previous phrase. Alternate translation: "for a person to see the sun" or "to be alive" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#)) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

Ecclesiastes 11:8

happy in all of them

Here the word “them” refers to the years that a person is alive.

the coming days of darkness

Future time is spoken of as if the “days are coming” And, here the word “darkness” refers to death. Alternate translation: “how many days that he will be dead” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-euphemism\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

for they will be many

Here the word “they” refers to the “days of darkness” Alternate translation: “for he will be dead for many more days than he is alive” or “for he will be dead forever”

Everything to come is vanishing vapor

Here “vanishing vapor” is a metaphor. This could mean: (1) Alternate translation: “No one knows what will happen after he dies” or (2) Alternate translation: “Everything to come is meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Everything to come

This could mean: (1) “Everything that happens after death” or (2) “Everything that happens in the future”

Ecclesiastes 11:9

Take joy, young man, in your youth, and let your heart be joyful in the days of your youth

These two phrases mean basically the same thing and are combined to emphasize that the man should be happy while he is young. (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.293)**)

let your heart be joyful

Here the word "heart" represents the emotions. Alternate translation: "be joyful" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Pursue the good desires of your heart

Here the word "heart" may represent the mind or emotions. Alternate translation: "Pursue the good things that you desire" or "Pursue the good things that you have determined to pursue" (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

whatever is within the sight of your eyes

Here "eyes" represent the whole person. Alternate translation: "whatever you see that you desire" or "whatever you see to be best" (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

God will bring you into judgment for all these things

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **judgment**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form such as "judge" or "make you account" Alternate translation: "God will judge you for all these things" or "God will make you account for all of your actions" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

Ecclesiastes 11:10

Drive anger away from your heart

Refusing to be angry is spoken of as if anger were something that can be forced away. Also, “heart” represents a person’s emotions. Alternate translation: “Refuse to be angry” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

because youth and its strength are vapor

The authors speaks of things as being useless and meaningless as if they were “vapor” Just as vapor disappears and does not last, the author speaks of things having no lasting value. See how you translated “vapor” in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “because youth and its strength will not last forever” or “because you will not be young and strong forever” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 12

Ecclesiastes 12 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Some translations set each line of poetry farther to the right than the rest of the text to make it easier to read. The ULT does this with the poetry in 12:1-7 and 12:13-14.

Special concepts in this chapter

Advice

This chapter gives a series of disconnected pieces of advice. Translators should not try to smooth the transitions between these pieces of advice. The advice in these statements do not apply in every situation. Therefore, they should be seen as “good ideas.”

Yahweh

At the end of a very impressive life, Solomon looks back and sees that the only real lasting thing in this world is Yahweh. The purpose of his life was to honor Yahweh, something he should have done far more throughout his life. Therefore, he felt that his life was wasted. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

Ecclesiastes 12:1

call to mind

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “remember” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

before the days of difficulty come

Future time is spoken of as if the “days are coming” Alternate translation: “before you experience difficult times” or “before bad things happen to you” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

before the years arrive when you say, “I have no pleasure in them,”

Future time is spoken of as if “years arrive” Alternate translation: “before you become old when you say, ‘I no longer enjoy being alive,’” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 12:2

do this before the light of the sun & after the rain

Growing old and dying is spoken of as if the sun and moon go dark and dark clouds return. Alternate translation: "do this before it seems to you that the light of the sun ... after the rain" (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 12:3

General Information:

General Information:

The writer describes a house in which various activities stop. This appears to be a metaphor for the human body as it becomes old. (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

strong men are bent over

Alternate translation: "strong men become weak"

the women who grind cease because they are few

Alternate translation: "the women who grind grain stop grinding grain because there are few of them"

Ecclesiastes 12:4

the doors are shut in the street

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “people shut the doors that lead to the street” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

when men are startled at the voice of a bird

It is implied that the voice of the birds startle the men awake. If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “when the voice of a bird startles men awake” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.251)**)

the singing of girls' voices fades away

Here “girls” may be a metaphor for the birds. Alternate translation: “the songs of the birds fade away” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

Ecclesiastes 12:5

when the almond tree blossoms

The “almond tree” is a tree that blossoms in the winter with white flowers. (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.311)**) (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.311)**)

when grasshoppers drag themselves along

A grasshopper is a large, straight-winged insect with long, jointed back legs that give it the ability to jump a long way. Here it can only drag itself because it has gotten old and weak. (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.311)**) (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.311)**)

when natural desires fail

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **desires**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form. Alternate translation: “when people no longer desire what they once did naturally” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.244)**)

Then man goes to his eternal home

This refers to death. Alternate translation: “Then man goes to the place of the dead forever” or “Then a person dies and never returns to life” (See: **Euphemism (p.264)**) (See: **Euphemism (p.264)**)

the mourners go down the streets

This could mean: (1) that mourners go down the streets to attend a funeral, or (2) that mourners go down the streets to the house of the person who is about to die.

Ecclesiastes 12:6

Call to mind

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “Remember” (See: **Idiom (p.273)**) (See: **Idiom (p.273)**)

before the silver cord is cut & or the water wheel is broken at the well

The writer speaks of dying as if it were one of these various broken items. Death will break the body just as suddenly as people accidentally break these items while they are using them. (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

the silver cord is cut

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “someone cuts the silver cord” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

the golden bowl is crushed

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “someone crushes the golden bowl” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

the pitcher is shattered

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “someone shatters the pitcher” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

the water wheel is broken

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “someone breaks the water wheel” (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 12:7

dust returns to the earth

Here the word “dust” refers to the human body that has decomposed. (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.286)**)

Ecclesiastes 12:8

A mist of vapor & everything is vanishing vapor

The Teacher speaks of things as being useless and meaningless as if they were “vapor.” Just as vapor disappears and does not last, the author speaks of things having no lasting value. See how you translated “vapor” in [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#). Alternate translation: “Temporary and useless ... everything is temporary and useless” or “Meaningless ... everything is meaningless” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

the Teacher

See how you translated this in [Ecclesiastes 1:1](#).

Ecclesiastes 12:9

contemplated and set in order

Alternate translation: “thought much about and arranged” or “thought much about and wrote down”

Ecclesiastes 12:10

using vivid & words

The Teacher wanted the words to be pleasurable to the listener. They bring pleasure because they are well written, not because they are comforting.

Ecclesiastes 12:11

The words of wise people & taught by one shepherd

The writer speaks of the teacher who uses his words to instruct people as if the teacher were a shepherd who uses his tools to lead his flock. (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)

The words of wise people are like goads

This is a simile. Alternate translation: "Wise people encourage people to act, like a sharp stick encourages an animal to move" (See: **Simile (p.304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

Like nails driven deeply are the words of the masters in collections of their proverbs

This is a simile. Alternate translation: "Like you can depend on a nail that a person drives firmly into a piece of wood, so you can depend on the words of the masters in collections of their proverbs" (See: **Simile (p.304)**) (See: **Simile (p.304)**)

the words of the masters in collections of their proverbs

Alternate translation: "the wise words collected in their proverbs" or "the sayings of the wise"

which are taught by one shepherd

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "which one shepherd teaches" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 12:12

the making of many books, which has no end

The noun phrase “the making” can be stated as a verb. Alternate translation: “people will never stop making many books”

brings weariness to the body

Here “body” represents the whole person. Alternate translation: “makes the person tired” (See: **Synecdoche (p. 309)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.309)**)

Ecclesiastes 12:13

The end of the matter

Alternate translation: "The final conclusion on the matter"

after everything has been heard

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "after you have heard everything" (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.246)**)

Ecclesiastes 12:14

along with every hidden thing

Things done in secret is spoken of as if they were an object that was hidden. Alternate translation: “along with everything that people do in secret” (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.280)**)



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Version 77

Abstract Nouns

Description

Abstract nouns are nouns that refer to attitudes, qualities, events, or situations. These are things that cannot be seen or touched in a physical sense, such as happiness, weight, unity, friendship, health, and reason. This is a translation issue because some languages may express a certain idea with an abstract noun, while others would need a different way to express it.

This page answers the question: *What are abstract nouns and how do I deal with them in my translation?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Parts of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Remember that nouns are words that refer to a person, place, thing, or idea. Abstract nouns are the nouns that refer to ideas. These can be attitudes, qualities, events, situations, or even relationships between those ideas. These are things that cannot be seen or touched in a physical sense, such as joy, peace, creation, goodness, contentment, justice, truth, freedom, vengeance, slowness, length, weight, and many, many more.

Some languages, such as Biblical Greek and English, use abstract nouns a lot. They provide a way of giving names to actions or qualities. With names, people who speak these languages can talk about the concepts as though they were things. For example, in languages that use abstract nouns, people can say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sin." But some languages do not use abstract nouns very much. In these languages, speakers may not have the two abstract nouns "forgiveness" and "sin," but they would express the same meaning in other ways. For example, they would express, "I believe that God is willing to forgive people after they have sinned," by using verb phrases instead of nouns for those ideas.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

The Bible that you translate from may use abstract nouns to express certain ideas. Your language might not use abstract nouns for some of those ideas. Instead, it might use phrases to express those ideas. Those phrases will use other kinds of words such as adjectives, verbs, or adverbs to express the meaning of the abstract noun. For example, "What is its **weight**?" could be expressed as "How much does it **weigh**?" or "How **heavy** is it?"

Examples From the Bible

From **childhood** you have known the sacred writings ... (2 Timothy 3:15a ULT)

The abstract noun "childhood" refers to when someone was a child.

But **godliness** with **contentment** is great **gain**. (1 Timothy 6:6 ULT)

The abstract nouns "godliness" and "contentment" refer to being godly and content. The abstract noun "gain" refers to something that benefits or helps someone.

Today **salvation** has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. (Luke 19:9 ULT)

The abstract noun "salvation" here refers to being saved.

The Lord does not move slowly concerning his promises, as some consider **slowness** to be (2 Peter 3:9a ULT)

The abstract noun "slowness" refers to the lack of speed with which something is done.

He will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the **purposes** of the heart. (1 Corinthians 4:5b ULT)

The abstract noun "purposes" refers to the things that people want to do and the reasons they want to do them.

Translation Strategies

If an abstract noun would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here is another option:

(1) Reword the sentence with a phrase that expresses the meaning of the abstract noun. Instead of a noun, the new phrase will use a verb, an adverb, or an adjective to express the idea of the abstract noun.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Reword the sentence with a phrase that expresses the meaning of the abstract noun. Instead of a noun, the new phrase will use a verb, an adverb, or an adjective to express the idea of the abstract noun. Alternative translations are indented below the Scripture example.

... from **childhood** you have known the sacred writings ... (2 Timothy 3:15a ULT)

Ever since **you were a child** you have known the sacred writings.

But **godliness** with **contentment** is great **gain**. (1 Timothy 6:6 ULT)

But **being godly** and **content** is very **beneficial**. But we **benefit** greatly when we **are godly** and **content**. But we **benefit** greatly when we **honor and obey God** and when we are **happy with what we have**.

Today **salvation** has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. (Luke 19:9 ULT)

Today the people in this house **have been saved** ... Today God **has saved** the people in this house ...

The Lord does not move slowly concerning his promises, as some consider **slowness** to be. (2 Peter 3:9a ULT)

The Lord does not move slowly concerning his promises, as some consider **moving slowly** to be.

He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the **purposes** of the heart. (1 Corinthians 4:5b ULT)

He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal **the things that people want to do and the reasons that they want to do them**.

"

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 2:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:5](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:25](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:27](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:10](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:19](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:5](#)

Active or Passive

Some languages use both active and passive sentences. In active sentences, the subject does the action. In passive sentences, the subject is the one that receives the action. Here are some examples with their subjects bolded:

- Active: **My father** built the house in 2010.
- Passive: **The house** was built in 2010.

Translators whose languages do not use passive sentences will need to know how they can translate passive sentences that they find in the Bible. Other translators will need to decide when to use a passive sentence and when to use the active form.

This page answers the question: *What do active and passive mean, and how do I translate passive sentences?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Verbs ([UTA PDF](#))

Description

Some languages have both active and passive forms of sentences.

- In the active form, the subject does the action and is always mentioned.
- In the passive form, the action is done to the subject, and the one who does the action is not always mentioned.

In the examples of active and passive sentences below, we have bolded the subject.

- active: **My father** built the house in 2010.
- passive: **The house** was built by my father in 2010.
- passive: **The house** was built in 2010. (This does not tell who did the action.)

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

All languages use active forms. Some languages use passive forms, and some do not. Some languages use passive forms only for certain purposes, and the passive form is not used for the same purposes in all of the languages that use it.

Purposes for the Passive

- The speaker is talking about the person or thing the action was done to, not about the person who did the action.
- The speaker does not want to tell who did the action.
- The speaker does not know who did the action.

Translation Principles Regarding the Passive

- Translators whose language does not use passive forms will need to find another way to express the idea.
- Translators whose language has passive forms will need to understand why the passive is used in a particular sentence in the Bible and decide whether or not to use a passive form for that purpose in his translation of the sentence.

Examples From the Bible

Then their shooters shot at your soldiers from off the wall, and some of the king's servants **were killed**, and your servant Uriah the Hittite **was killed** too. (2 Samuel 11:24 ULT)

This means that the enemy's shooters shot and killed some of the king's servants, including Uriah. The point is what happened to the king's servants and Uriah, not who shot them. The purpose of the passive form here is to keep the focus on the king's servants and Uriah.

When the men of the city arose early in the morning, and see, the altar of Baal **was torn down**.
(Judges 6:28a ULT)

The men of the town saw what had happened to the altar of Baal, but they did not know who broke it down. The purpose of the passive form here is to communicate this event from the perspective of the men of the town.

It would be better for him if a millstone **were put** around his neck and he **were thrown** into the sea. (Luke 17:2a ULT)

This describes a situation in which a person ends up in the sea with a millstone around his neck. The purpose of the passive form here is to keep the focus on what happens to this person. Who does these things to the person is not important.

Translation Strategies

If your language would use a passive form for the same purpose as in the passage that you are translating, then use a passive form. If you decide that it is better to translate without a passive form, here are some strategies that you might consider.

(1) Use the same verb in an active sentence and tell who or what did the action. If you do this, try to keep the focus on the person receiving the action. (2) Use the same verb in an active sentence, and do not tell who or what did the action. Instead, use a generic expression like "they" or "people" or "someone." (3) Use a different verb.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Use the same verb in an active sentence and tell who did the action. If you do this, try to keep the focus on the person receiving the action.

A loaf of bread **was given** him every day from the street of the bakers. (Jeremiah 37:21b ULT)

The king's servants gave Jeremiah a loaf of bread every day from the street of the bakers.

(2) Use the same verb in an active sentence, and do not tell who did the action. Instead, use a generic expression like "they" or "people" or "someone."

It would be better for him if a millstone **were put** around his neck and he **were thrown** into the sea. (Luke 17:2a ULT)

It would be better for him if **they were to put** a millstone around his neck and **throw** him into the sea. It would be better for him if **someone were to put** a heavy stone around his neck and **throw** him into the sea.

(3) Use a different verb in an active sentence.

A loaf of bread **was given** him every day from the street of the bakers. (Jeremiah 37:21 ULT)

He **received** a loaf of bread every day from the street of the bakers.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[Abstract Nouns \(UTA PDF\)](#)
[Word Order \(UTA PDF\)](#)

Referenced in: Ecclesiastes 1:9; Ecclesiastes 1:10; Ecclesiastes 1:11; Ecclesiastes 1:14; Ecclesiastes 1:15; Ecclesiastes 2:6; Ecclesiastes 2:16; Ecclesiastes 2:17; Ecclesiastes 3:14; Ecclesiastes 4:12; Ecclesiastes 5:8; Ecclesiastes 5:13; Ecclesiastes 6:3; Ecclesiastes 6:7; Ecclesiastes 6:10; Ecclesiastes 6:11; Ecclesiastes 7:21; Ecclesiastes 7:26; Ecclesiastes 8:1; Ecclesiastes 8:8; Ecclesiastes 8:9; Ecclesiastes 8:10; Ecclesiastes 8:11; Ecclesiastes 8:13; Ecclesiastes 8:14; Ecclesiastes 8:16; Ecclesiastes 8:17; Ecclesiastes 9:3; Ecclesiastes 9:5; Ecclesiastes 9:6; Ecclesiastes 9:8; Ecclesiastes 9:12; Ecclesiastes 9:15; Ecclesiastes 9:16; Ecclesiastes 9:17; Ecclesiastes 10:6; Ecclesiastes 10:9; Ecclesiastes 10:11; Ecclesiastes 10:15; Ecclesiastes 12:4; Ecclesiastes 12:6; Ecclesiastes 12:11; Ecclesiastes 12:13

Apostrophe

Description

An apostrophe is a figure of speech in which a speaker turns his attention away from his listeners and speaks to someone or something that he knows cannot hear him. He does this to tell his listeners his message or feelings about that person or thing in a very strong way.

This page answers the question: *What is the figure of speech called an apostrophe?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Many languages do not use apostrophe, and readers could be confused by it. They may wonder who the speaker is talking to, or think that the speaker is crazy to talk to things or people who cannot hear.

Examples from the Bible

Mountains of Gilboa, let there not be dew or rain on you. (2 Samuel 1:21a ULT)

King Saul was killed on Mount Gilboa, and David sang a sad song about it. By telling these mountains that he wanted them to have no dew or rain, he showed how sad he was.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those sent to you. (Luke 13:34a ULT)

Jesus was expressing his feelings for the people of Jerusalem in front of his disciples and a group of Pharisees. By speaking directly to Jerusalem as though its people could hear him, Jesus showed how deeply he cared about them.

He cried against the altar by the word of Yahweh: "**Altar, altar!** This is what Yahweh says, 'See, ... on you they will burn human bones.'" (1 Kings 13:2 ULT)

The man of God spoke as if the altar could hear him, but he really wanted the king, who was standing there, to hear him.

Translation Strategies

If apostrophe would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. But if this way of speaking would be confusing to your people, let the speaker continue speaking to the people that are listening to him as he tells **them** his message or feelings about the people or thing that cannot hear him. See the example below.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

He cried against the altar by the word of Yahweh: "**Altar, altar!** This is what Yahweh says, 'See, ... on you they will burn human bones.'" (1 Kings 13:2 ULT)

He said this about the altar: "This is what Yahweh says **about this altar**. 'See, ... they will burn people's bones on **it**.'"

Mountains of Gilboa, let there not be dew or rain on **you**. (2 Samuel 1:21a ULT)

As for these mountains of Gilboa, let there not be dew or rain on **them**.

"

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 10:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:17](#)

Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Assumed knowledge is whatever a speaker assumes his audience knows before he speaks and gives them some kind of information. The speaker does not give the audience this information because he believes that they already know it.

This page answers the question: *How can I be sure that my translation communicates the assumed knowledge and implicit information along with the explicit information of the original message?*

When the speaker does give the audience information, he can do so in two ways. The speaker gives explicit information in what he states directly. Implicit Information is what the speaker does not state directly because he expects his audience to be able to learn it from other things he says.

Description

When someone speaks or writes, he has something specific that he wants people to know or do or think about. He normally states this directly. This is explicit information.

The speaker assumes that his audience already knows certain things that they will need to think about in order to understand this information. Normally he does not tell people these things, because they already know them. This is called assumed knowledge.

The speaker does not always directly state everything that he expects his audience to learn from what he says. Implicit information is information that he expects people to learn from what he says even though he does not state it directly.

Often, the audience understands this implicit information by combining what they already know (assumed knowledge) with the explicit information that the speaker tells them directly.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

All three kinds of information are part of the speaker's message. If one of these kinds of information is missing, then the audience will not understand the message. Because the target translation is in a language that is very different from the biblical languages and is made for an audience that lives in a very different time and place than the people in the Bible, many times the assumed knowledge or the implicit information is missing from the message. In other words, modern readers do not know everything that the original speakers and hearers in the Bible knew. When these things are important for understanding the message, it is helpful if you include this information in the text or in a footnote.

Examples From the Bible

Then a scribe came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes**, and the birds of the sky **have nests**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:19-20 ULT)

Jesus did not say what foxes and birds use holes and nests for, because he assumed that the scribe would have known that foxes sleep in holes in the ground and birds sleep in their nests. This is **assumed knowledge**.

Jesus did not directly say here "I am the Son of Man" but, if the scribe did not already know it, then that fact would be **implicit information** that he could learn because Jesus referred to himself that way. Also, Jesus did not state explicitly that he travelled a lot and did not have a house that he slept in every night. That is **implicit information** that the scribe could learn when Jesus said that he had nowhere to lay his head.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the mighty deeds had been done in **Tyre and Sidon** which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But

I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the **day of judgment** than for you.
(Matthew 11:21-22 ULT)

Jesus assumed that the people he was speaking to knew that Tyre and Sidon were very wicked, and that the day of judgment is a time when God will judge every person. Jesus also knew that the people he was talking to believed that they were good and did not need to repent. Jesus did not need to tell them these things. This is all **assumed knowledge**.

An important piece of **implicit information** here is that the people he was speaking to would be judged more severely than the people of Tyre and Sidon would be judged **because** they did not repent.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not wash their hands when they eat bread**. (Matthew 15:2 ULT)

One of the traditions of the elders was a ceremony in which people would wash their hands in order to be ritually clean before eating. People thought that in order to be righteous, they had to follow all the traditions of the elders. This was **assumed knowledge** that the Pharisees who were speaking to Jesus expected him to know. By saying this, they were accusing his disciples of not following the traditions, and thus not being righteous. This is **implicit information** that they wanted him to understand from what they said.

Translation Strategies

If readers have enough assumed knowledge to be able to understand the message, along with any important implicit information that goes with the explicit information, then it is good to leave that knowledge unstated and leave the implicit information implicit. If the readers do not understand the message because one of these is missing for them, then follow these strategies:

- (1) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not have certain assumed knowledge, then provide that knowledge as explicit information.
- (2) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not know certain implicit information, then state that information clearly, but try to do it in a way that does not imply that the information was new to the original audience.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not have certain assumed knowledge, then provide that knowledge as explicit information.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes**, and the birds of the sky **have nests**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that the foxes slept in their holes and birds slept in their nests.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes to live in**, and the birds of the sky **have nests to live in**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head and sleep."

It will be more tolerable for **Tyre and Sidon** at the day of judgment than for you (Matthew 11:22 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that the people of Tyre and Sidon were very, very wicked. This can be stated explicitly.

At the day of judgment, it will be more tolerable for **those cities of Tyre and Sidon, whose people were very wicked**, than it will be for you. or At the day of judgment, It will be more tolerable for those **wicked cities, Tyre and Sidon**, than for you.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not wash their hands** when they eat bread. (Matthew 15:2 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that one of the traditions of the elders was a ceremony in which people would wash their hands in order to be ritually clean before eating, which they must do to be righteous. It was not to remove germs from their hands to avoid sickness, as a modern reader might think.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not go through the ceremonial handwashing ritual of righteousness** when they eat bread.

(2) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not know certain implicit information, then state that information clearly, but try to do it in a way that does not imply that the information was new to the original audience.

Then a scribe came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:19-20 ULT)

The implicit information is that Jesus himself is the Son of Man. Other implicit information is that if the scribe wanted to follow Jesus, then, like Jesus, he would have to live without a house.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but **I, the Son of Man, have no home to rest in. If you want to follow me, you will live as I live.**"

It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you (Matthew 11:22 ULT)

The implicit information is that God would not only judge the people; he would punish them. This can be made explicit.

At the day of judgment, God will **punish Tyre and Sidon**, cities whose people were very wicked, **less severely than he will punish you.** or: At the day of judgment, God will **punish you more severely** than Tyre and Sidon, cities whose people were very wicked.

Modern readers may not know some of the things that the people in the Bible and the people who first read it knew. This can make it hard for them to understand what a speaker or writer says, and to learn things that the speaker left implicit. Translators may need to state some things explicitly in the translation that the original speaker or writer left unstated or implicit.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Making Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information Explicit ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 1:13](#); [Ecclesiastes 2 General Notes](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:20](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:14](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 6 General Notes](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:23](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:18](#); [Ecclesiastes 12 General Notes](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:4](#)

Direct and Indirect Quotations

Description

There are two kinds of quotations: direct quotations and indirect quotations.

A direct quotation occurs when someone reports what another person said from the viewpoint of that original speaker. People usually expect that this kind of quotation will represent the original speaker's exact words. In the example below, John would have said "I" when referring to himself, so the narrator, who is reporting John's words, uses the word "I" in the quotation to refer to John. To show that these are John's exact words, many languages put the words between quotation marks: "".

- John said, "I do not know at what time I will arrive."

An indirect quotation occurs when a speaker reports what someone else said, but in this case, the speaker is reporting it from his own point of view instead and not from the original person's point of view. This kind of quotation usually contains changes in pronouns, and it often includes changes in time, in word choices, and in length. In the example below, the narrator refers to John as "he" in the quotation and uses the word "would" to replace the future tense, indicated by "will."

- John said that he did not know at what time he would arrive.

This page answers the question: *What are direct and indirect quotations?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Pronouns ([UTA PDF](#))

Verbs ([UTA PDF](#))

Quotations and Quote Margins ([UTA PDF](#))

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In some languages, reported speech can be expressed by either direct or indirect quotations. In other languages, it is more natural to use one than the other. There may be a certain meaning implied by using one rather than the other. So for each quotation, translators need to decide whether it is best to translate it as a direct quotation or as an indirect quotation.

Examples From the Bible

The verses in the examples below contain both direct and indirect quotations. In the explanation below the verse, we have marked in bold the words that are quoted.

And he commanded him to tell no one, but, "Go, show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing, according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them."
(Luke 5:14 ULT)

- Indirect quote: He commanded him **to tell no one**,
- Direct quote: but told him, "**Go, show yourself to the priest ...**"

And being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with careful observation. Neither will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17:20-21 ULT)

- Indirect quote: Being asked by the Pharisees **when the kingdom of God was coming**,
- Direct quote: he answered them and said, "**The kingdom of God is not coming with careful observation. Neither will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is among you.**"
- Direct quotes: Neither will they say, '**Look, here it is!**' or, '**There it is!**'

Translation Strategies

If the kind of quote used in the source text would work well in your language, consider using it. If the kind of quote used in that context is not natural for your language, follow these strategies.

- (1) If a direct quote would not work well in your language, change it to an indirect quote.
- (2) If an indirect quote would not work well in your language, change it to a direct quote.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If a direct quote would not work well in your language, change it to an indirect quote.

And he commanded him to tell no one, but, **“Go, show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing, according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.”** (Luke 5:14 ULT)

He commanded him to tell no one, but **to go and show himself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for his cleansing according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.**

- (2) If an indirect quote would not work well in your language, change it to a direct quote.

And he commanded him **to tell no one**, but, “Go, show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing, according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.” (Luke 5:14 ULT)

He commanded him, **“Tell no one.** But go and show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.”

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_quotations.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Quotes within Quotes ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 2:2](#)

Double Negatives

A double negative occurs when a clause has two words that each express the meaning of “not.” Double negatives mean very different things in different languages. To translate sentences that have double negatives accurately and clearly, you need to know what a double negative means in the Bible and how to express this idea in your language.

This page answers the question: *What are double negatives?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Parts of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Description

Negative words are words that have in them the meaning “not.” Examples in English are “no,” “not,” “none,” “no one,” “nothing,” “nowhere,” “never,” “nor,” “neither,” and “without.” Also, some words have prefixes or suffixes that mean “not,” such as the bolded parts of these words: “**un**happy,” “**im**possible,” and “**useless**.” Some other kinds of words also have a negative meaning, such as “lack” or “reject,” or even “fight” or “evil.”

A double negative occurs when a clause has two words that each have a negative meaning.

We did this **not** because we have **no** authority ... (2 Thessalonians 3:9a ULT)

And this was **not** done **without** an oath! (Hebrews 7:20a ULT)

Be sure of this—the wicked person will **not** go **un**punished. (Proverbs 11:21a ULT)

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Double negatives mean very different things in different languages.

- In some languages, such as English, a second negative in a clause cancels the first one, creating a positive sentence. So, “He is not unintelligent” means “He is intelligent.”
- In some languages, such as French and Spanish, two negative words in a clause do not cancel each other to become a positive. The Spanish sentence, “No vi a nadie,” literally says “I did not see no one.” It has both the word ‘no’ next to the verb and ‘nadie,’ which means “no one.” The two negatives are seen as in agreement with each other, and the sentence means, “I did not see anyone.”
- In some languages, a double negative creates a stronger negative statement.
- In some languages, a double negative creates a positive sentence, but it is a weak statement. So, “He is not unintelligent” means, “He is somewhat intelligent.”
- In some languages, including the languages of the Bible, a double negative can produce a stronger positive meaning than a simple positive statement. So, “He is not unintelligent” can mean “He is very intelligent.” In this case, the double negative is actually the figure of speech called [litotes](#).

Biblical Greek can do all of the above. So to translate sentences with double negatives accurately and clearly in your language, you need to know what each double negative means in the Bible and how to express the same idea in your language.

Examples From the Bible

The Greek of John 15:5 says:

χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν
Without me **not** you can do **nothing**

We cannot reproduce this double negative in the English ULT because in English, a second negative in a clause cancels the first one. In English, and perhaps in your language, we need to choose only one of the negatives and say either:

Without me, you can do **nothing**.

or:

Without me, you **cannot** do anything.

... in order **not** to be **unfruitful**. (Titus 3:14b ULT)

This means "in order to be fruitful."

A prophet is **not without** honor (Mark 6:4 ULT)

This means "a prophet is honored."

I do **not** want you to be **ignorant**. (1 Corinthians 12:1)

This means "I want you to be knowledgeable."

Translation Strategies

If the way that the double negative is used in the Bible is natural and has the same meaning as in your language, consider using it in the same way. Otherwise, you could consider these strategies:

- (1) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is to make a positive statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove the two negatives so that it is positive.
- (2) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is to make a negative statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove one of the two negatives.
- (3) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is to make a stronger negative statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove one of the two negatives and add a strengthening word.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is to make a positive statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove the two negatives so that it is positive.

For we do **not** have a high priest who **cannot** feel sympathy for our weaknesses. (Hebrews 4:15a ULT)

"For we have a high priest who can feel sympathy for our weaknesses."

... in order **not** to be **unfruitful**. (Titus 3:14b ULT)

"... so that they may be fruitful."

- (2) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is to make a negative statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove one of the two negatives.

χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν
Without me **not** you can do **nothing** (John 15:5)

Without me, you can do **nothing**.

or:

Without me, you **cannot** do anything.

(3) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is to make a stronger negative statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove one of the two negatives and add a strengthening word.

...ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου (Matthew 5:18)

...iota one or one serif **not not** may pass away from the law

...**not even** one iota or one serif may pass away from the law

or:

...**certainly no** iota or serif may pass away from the law

Next we recommend you learn about:

Verbs ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 6:2](#)

Doublet

Description

We are using the word “doublet” to refer to two words or phrases that are used together and either mean the same thing or mean very close to the same thing. Often they are joined with the word “and.” Unlike [Hendiadys](#), in which one of the words modifies the other, in a doublet the two words or phrases are equal and are used to emphasize or intensify the one idea that is expressed by the two words or phrases.

This page answers the question: *What are doublets and how can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

A very similar issue is the repetition of the same word or phrase for emphasis, usually with no other words between them. Because these figures of speech are so similar and have the same effect, we will treat them here together.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In some languages people do not use doublets. Or they may use doublets, but only in certain situations, so a doublet might not make sense in their language in some verses. People might think that the verse is describing two ideas or actions, when it is only describing one. In this case, translators may need to find some other way to express the meaning expressed by the doublet.

Examples From the Bible

He has one people **scattered** and **dispersed** among the peoples (Esther 3:8 ULT)

The bolded words mean the same thing. Together they mean the people were spread out.

He attacked two men **more righteous** and **better** than himself. (1 Kings 2:32b ULT)

This means that they were “much more righteous” than he was.

You have decided to prepare **false** and **deceptive** words. (Daniel 2:9b ULT)

This means that they had decided to lie, which is another way of saying that they intended to deceive people.

... like of a lamb **without blemish** and **without spot**. (1 Peter 1:19b ULT)

This means that he was like a lamb that did not have any defect—not even one.

Then they approached {and} woke him up, saying, “**Master! Master!** We are perishing!” (Luke 8:24 ULT)

The repetition of “Master” means that the disciples called to Jesus urgently and continually.

Translation Strategies

If a doublet would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, consider these strategies.

- (1) Translate only one of the words or phrases.
- (2) If the doublet is used to intensify the meaning, translate one of the words or phrases and add a word that intensifies it such as “very” or “great” or “many.”
- (3) If the doublet is used to intensify or emphasize the meaning, use one of your language’s ways of doing that.

Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Translate only one of the words.

You have decided to prepare **false** and **deceptive** words. (Daniel 2:9b ULT)

"You have decided to prepare **false** things to say."

(2) If the doublet is used to intensify the meaning, translate one of the words and add a word that intensifies it such as "very" or "great" or "many."

He has one people **scattered** and **dispersed** among the peoples (Esther 3:8 ULT)

"He has one people **very spread out**."

(3) If the doublet is used to intensify or emphasize the meaning, use one of your language's ways of doing that.

... like a lamb **without blemish** and **without spot**. (1 Peter 1:19b ULT)

• English can emphasize this with "any" and "at all."

"... like a lamb **without any blemish at all**."

Then they approached {and} woke him up, saying, "**Master! Master!** We are perishing!" (Luke 8:24 ULT)

Then they approached {and} woke him up, **urgently shouting, "Master!**
We are perishing!"

"

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 1:13](#); [Ecclesiastes 1:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:5](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:23](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:18](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:19](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:26](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:6](#)

Ellipsis

Description

An ellipsis¹ occurs when a speaker or writer leaves out one or more words that normally should be in the sentence. The speaker or writer does this because he knows that the hearer or reader will understand the meaning of the sentence and supply the words in his mind when he hears or reads the words that are there. For example:

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, **nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.**
(Psalm 1:5 ULT)

There is ellipsis in the second part because “nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous” is not a complete sentence. The speaker assumes that the hearer will understand what it is that sinners will not do in the assembly of the righteous by filling in the action from the previous clause. With the action filled in, the complete sentence would read:

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor **will** sinners **stand** in the assembly of the righteous.

Two Types of Ellipsis

A Relative Ellipsis happens when the reader has to supply the omitted word or words from the context. Usually the word is in the previous sentence, as in the example above.

An Absolute Ellipsis happens when the omitted word or words are not in the context, but the phrases are common enough in the language that the reader is expected to supply what is missing from this common usage or from the nature of the situation.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Readers who see incomplete sentences or phrases may not know that there is information missing that the writer expects them to fill in. Or readers may understand that there is information missing, but they may not know what information is missing because they do not know the original biblical language, culture, or situation as the original readers did. In this case, they may fill in the wrong information. Or readers may misunderstand the ellipsis if they do not use ellipsis in the same way in their language.

Examples From the Bible

Relative Ellipsis

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf **and Sirion like a young ox.** (Psalm 29:6 ULT)

The writer wants his words to be few and to make good poetry. The full sentence with the information filled in would be:

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf and **he makes** Sirion **skip** like a young ox.

Watch carefully, therefore, how you walk—**not as unwise but as wise.** (Ephesians 5:15b ULT)

This page answers the question: *What is ellipsis ?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

The information that the reader must understand in the second parts of these sentences can be filled in from the first parts:

Watch carefully, therefore, how you walk—**walk** not as unwise but **walk** as wise,

Absolute Ellipsis

Then when he had come near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And so he said, “Lord, **that I might recover my sight.**” (Luke 18:40b-41 ULT)

It seems that the man answered in an incomplete sentence because he wanted to be polite and not directly ask Jesus for healing. He knew that Jesus would understand that the only way he could receive his sight would be for Jesus to heal him. The complete sentence would be:

“Lord, **I want you to heal me so** that I might receive my sight.”

To Titus, a true son in our common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. (Titus 1:4 ULT)

The writer assumes that the reader will recognize this common form of a blessing or wish, so he does not need to include the full sentence, which would be:

To Titus, a true son in our common faith. **May you receive** grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Translation Strategies

If ellipsis would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here is another option:

(1) Add the missing words to the incomplete phrase or sentence.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Add the missing words to the incomplete phrase or sentence.

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor **sinner in the assembly** of the righteous. (Psalm 1:5 ULT)

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, and **sinner will not stand in the assembly** of the righteous.

Then when he had come near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And so he said, “Lord, **that I might recover my sight.**” (Luke 18:40b-41 ULT)

Then when the man was near, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, **I want you to heal me** that I might receive my sight.”

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf **and Sirion like a young ox.** (Psalm 29:6 ULT)

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and **he makes** Sirion **skip** like a young ox.

English has a punctuation symbol which is also called an ellipsis. It is a series of three dots (...) used to indicate an intentional omission of a word, phrase, sentence or more from text without altering its original meaning. This translationAcademy article is not about the punctuation mark, but about the concept of omission of words that normally should be in the sentence. ↩

"

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 1:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:2](#)

Euphemism

Description

A euphemism is a mild or polite way of referring to something that is unpleasant, embarrassing, or socially unacceptable, such as death or activities usually done in private.

This page answers the question: *What is a euphemism?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

... they found Saul and his sons **fallen** on Mount Gilboa.
(1 Chronicles 10:8b ULT)

This means that Saul and his sons “were dead.” It is a euphemism because the important thing was not that Saul and his sons had fallen but that they were dead. Sometimes people do not like to speak directly about death because it is unpleasant.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Different languages use different euphemisms. If the target language does not use the same euphemism as in the source language, readers may not understand what it means and they may think that the writer means only what the words literally say.

Examples From the Bible

... where there was a cave. Saul went inside to **cover his feet**. (1 Samuel 24:3b ULT)

The original hearers would have understood that Saul went into the cave to use it as a toilet, but the writer wanted to avoid offending or distracting them, so **he did not say specifically** what Saul did or what he left in the cave.

But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I have not **known a man?**” (Luke 1:34 ULT)

In order **to be polite**, Mary uses a euphemism to say that she has never had sexual intercourse with a man.

Translation Strategies

If euphemism would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are other options:

- (1) Use a euphemism from your own culture.
- (2) State the information plainly without a euphemism if it would not be offensive.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use a euphemism from your own culture.

... where there was a cave. Saul went inside to **cover his feet**. (1 Samuel 24:3b ULT) — Some languages might use euphemisms like these:

“... where there was a cave. Saul went into the cave to **dig a hole**”

“... where there was a cave. Saul went into the cave to **have some time alone**”

But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I have not **known a man?**” (Luke 1:34 ULT)

But Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I have not **slept with a man?**"

(2) State the information plainly without a euphemism if it would not be offensive.

They found Saul and his sons **fallen** on Mount Gilboa. (1 Chronicles 10:8b ULT)

"They found Saul and his sons **dead** on Mount Gilboa."

"

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 5:15](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:5](#)

Hyperbole

Description

A speaker or writer can use exactly the same words to say something that he means as completely true, or as generally true, or as a hyperbole. This is why it can be hard to decide how to understand a statement. For example, the sentence below could mean three different things.

It rains here every night.

The speaker means this as literally true if he means that it really does rain here every night.

The speaker means this as a **generalization** if he means that it rains here most nights.

The speaker means this as a **hyperbole** if he wants to say that it rains more than it actually does, usually in order to express a strong attitude toward the amount or frequency of rain, such as being annoyed or being happy about it.

This page answers the question: *What are hyperboles? What are generalizations? How can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Hyperbole

In hyperbole, a figure of speech that uses exaggeration, a speaker deliberately describes something with an extreme or even unreal statement, usually to show his strong feeling or opinion about it. He expects people to understand that he is exaggerating.

They will not leave **stone upon stone in you**. (Luke 19:44b ULT)

This is an exaggeration. It means that the enemies will completely destroy Jerusalem.

Moses was educated in **all the wisdom of the Egyptians**. (Acts 7:22a ULT)

This hyperbole means that he had learned everything an Egyptian education could offer.

Generalization

This is a statement that is true most of the time or in most situations that it could apply to.

The one who ignores instruction **will have poverty and shame**, but **honor will come** to him who learns from correction. (Proverbs 13:18)

These generalizations tell about what normally happens to people who ignore instruction and what normally happens to people who learn from correction. There may be some exceptions to these statements, but they are generally true.

And when you pray, do not make useless repetitions as **the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words**. (Matthew 6:7)

This generalization tells about what Gentiles were known for doing. Many Gentiles did this. It does not matter if a few did not. The point was that the hearers should not join in this well-known practice.

Even though a hyperbole or a generalization may have a strong-sounding word like “all,” “always,” “none,” or “never,” it does not necessarily mean **exactly** “all,” “always,” “none,” or “never.” It simply means “most,” “most of the time,” “hardly any,” or “rarely.”

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Readers need to be able to understand whether or not a statement is literally true.

If readers realize that a statement is not literally true, they need to be able to understand whether it is a hyperbole, a generalization, or a lie. (Though the Bible is completely true, it tells about people who did not always tell the truth.)

Examples From the Bible

Examples of Hyperbole

If your hand causes you to stumble, **cut it off**. It is better for you to enter into life maimed ... (Mark 9:43a ULT)

When Jesus said to cut off your hand, he meant that we should **do whatever extreme things** we need to do in order not to sin. He used this hyperbole to show how extremely important it is to try to stop sinning.

The Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel with 3,000 chariots, 6,000 men to drive the chariots, and troops **as numerous as the sand on the seashore**. (1 Samuel 13:5a ULT)

The bolded phrase is an exaggeration for the purpose of expressing the emotion that the Philistine army was overwhelming in number. It means that there were **many, many** soldiers in the Philistine army.

But as his anointing teaches you **everything** and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, remain in him. (1 John 2:27b ULT)

This is a hyperbole. It expresses the assurance that God's Spirit teaches us about **all things that we need to know**. God's Spirit does not teach us about everything that it is possible to know.

When they found him, they also said to him, "**Everyone** is looking for you." (Mark 1:37 ULT)

The disciples probably did not mean that everyone in the city was looking for Jesus, but that **many people** were looking for him, or that all of Jesus' closest friends there were looking for him. This is an exaggeration for the purpose of expressing the emotion that they and many others were worried about him.

Examples of Generalization

Can **any good thing** come out of Nazareth? (John 1:46b ULT)

This rhetorical question is meant to express the generalization that there is nothing good in Nazareth. The people there had a reputation for being uneducated and not strictly religious. Of course, there were exceptions.

One of them, of their own prophets, has said, "**Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy bellies**." (Titus 1:12 ULT)

This is a generalization that means that Cretans had a reputation to be like this because, in general, this is how Cretans behaved. It is possible that there were exceptions.

A lazy hand causes a person to be poor, but the hand of the diligent person gains riches. (Proverbs 10:4 ULT)

This is generally true, and it reflects the experience of most people. It is possible that there are exceptions in some circumstances.

Caution

- Do not assume that something is an exaggeration just because it seems to be impossible. God does miraculous things.

They saw Jesus **walking on the sea** and coming near the boat. (John 6:19b ULT)

This is not hyperbole. Jesus really walked on the water. It is a literal statement.

- Do not assume that the word “all” is always a generalization that means “most.”

Yahweh is righteous in **all** his ways and gracious in **all** he does. (Psalms 145:17 ULT)

Yahweh is always righteous. This is a completely true statement.

Translation Strategies

If the hyperbole or generalization would be natural and people would understand it and not think that it is a lie, consider using it. If not, here are other options.

- (1) Express the meaning without the exaggeration.
- (2) For a generalization, show that it is a generalization by using a phrase like “in general” or “in most cases.”
- (3) For a hyperbole or a generalization, add a word like “many” or “almost” to show that the hyperbole or generalization is not meant to be exact.
- (4) For a hyperbole or a generalization that has a word like “all,” “always,” “none,” or “never,” consider deleting that word.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Express the meaning without the exaggeration.

The Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel: 3,000 chariots, 6,000 men to drive the chariots, and troops **as numerous as the sand on the seashore**. (1 Samuel 13:5a ULT)

The Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel: 3,000 chariots, 6,000 men to drive the chariots, and **a great number of troops**.

- (2) For a generalization, show that it is a generalization by using a phrase like “in general” or “in most cases.”

The one who ignores instruction will have poverty and shame. (Proverbs 13:18a ULT)

In general, the one who ignores instruction will have poverty and shame

When you pray, do not make useless repetitions as the **Gentiles do**, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. (Matthew 6:7 ULT)

And when you pray, do not make useless repetitions as the Gentiles **generally** do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

- (3) For a hyperbole or a generalization, add a word like “many” or “almost” to show that the hyperbole or generalization is not meant to be exact.

The **whole** country of Judea and **all** the people of Jerusalem went out to him. (Mark 1:5a ULT)

Almost all the country of Judea and **almost all** the people of Jerusalem went out to him. or:

Many of the country of Judea and **many** of the people of Jerusalem went out to him.

(4) For a hyperbole or a generalization that has a word like “all,” “always,” “none,” or “never,” consider deleting that word.

The **whole** country of Judea and **all** the people of Jerusalem went out to him. (Mark 1:5a ULT)

The country of Judea and the people of Jerusalem went out to him.

"

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 4:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:3](#)

Hypothetical Situations

Consider these phrases: “If the sun stopped shining ...” “What if the sun stopped shining ...” “Suppose the sun stopped shining ...” and “If only the sun had not stopped shining.” We use such expressions to set up hypothetical situations, imagining what might have happened or what could happen in the future but probably will not. We also use them to express regret or wishes. Hypothetical expressions occur often in the Bible. You (the translator) need to translate them in a way that people will know that the event did not actually happen and so that they will understand why the event was imagined.

This page answers the question: *What is a hypothetical situation?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Writing Styles ([UTA PDF](#))

Description

Hypothetical situations are situations that are not real. They can be in the past, present, or future. Hypothetical situations in the past and present have not happened, are not happening now, and ones in the future are not expected to happen.

People sometimes tell about conditions and what would happen if those conditions were met, but they know that these things have not happened or probably will not happen. (The conditions comprise a phrase that starts with “if.”)

- If he had lived to be 100 years old, he would have seen his grandson’s grandson. (But he did not.)
- If he lived to be 100 years old, he would still be alive today. (But he is not.)
- If he lives to be 100 years old, he will see his grandson’s grandson. (But he probably will not.)

People sometimes express wishes about things that have not happened or that are not expected to happen.

- I wish he had come.
- I wish he were here.
- I wish he would come.

People sometimes express regrets about things that have not happened or that are not expected to happen.

- If only he had come.
- If only he were here.
- If only he would come.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Translators need to recognize the different kinds of hypothetical situations in the Bible and understand that they are unreal.
- Translators need to know their own language’s ways of talking about different kinds of hypothetical situations.

Examples From the Bible

Hypothetical Situations in the Past

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! **If the mighty deeds had been done** in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, **they would have repented** long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” (Matthew 11:21 ULT)

Here in Matthew 11:21, Jesus said that **if** the people living in the ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon had been able to see the miracles that he performed, they would have repented long ago. The people of Tyre and Sidon did not actually see his miracles, and they did not repent. He said this to rebuke the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida who had seen his miracles and yet did not repent.

Martha then said to Jesus, “Lord, **if you had been here, my brother would not have died.**” (John 11:21 ULT)

Martha said this to express her wish that Jesus would have come sooner so that her brother would not have died. But Jesus did not come sooner and her brother did die.

Hypothetical Situations in the Present

And no man puts new wine into old wineskins. **But if he did do that, the new wine would burst the wineskins, and it would be spilled out, and the wineskins would be destroyed.** (Luke 5:37 ULT)

Jesus told about what would happen if a person were to put new wine into old wineskins. But no one would do that. He used this imaginary situation as an example to show that there are times when it is unwise to mix new things with old things. He did this so that people could understand why his disciples were not fasting as people traditionally did.

Jesus said to them, “What man would there be among you, who, **if he had just one sheep, and if this sheep fell into a deep hole on the Sabbath, would not grasp hold of it and lift it out?**” (Matthew 12:11 ULT)

Jesus asked the religious leaders what they would do on the Sabbath if one of their sheep fell into a hole. He was not saying that their sheep would fall into a hole. He used this imaginary situation to show them that they were wrong to judge him for healing people on the Sabbath.

Hypothetical Situation in the Future

Unless those days are shortened, no flesh would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened. (Matthew 24:22 ULT)

Jesus was talking about a future time when very bad things would happen. He told what would happen if those days of trouble were to last a long time. He did this to show how bad those days will be—so bad that if they lasted a long time, no one would be saved. But then he clarified that God will shorten those days of trouble so that the elect (those he has chosen) will be saved.

Expressing Emotion About a Hypothetical Situation

People sometimes talk about hypothetical situations in order to express regrets and wishes. Regrets are about the past and wishes are about the present and future.

The Israelites said to them, “**If only we had died by Yahweh’s hand in the land of Egypt when we were sitting by the pots of meat and were eating bread to the full.** For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill our whole community with hunger.” (Exodus 16:3 ULT)

Here the Israelites were afraid that they would have to suffer and die of hunger in the wilderness, and so they wished that they had stayed in Egypt and died there with full stomachs. They were complaining, expressing regret that this had not happened.

I know what you have done, and that you are neither cold nor hot. **I wish that you were either cold or hot!** (Revelation 3:15 ULT)

Jesus wished that the people were either hot or cold, but they are neither. He was rebuking them, expressing anger at this.

Translation Strategies

Find out how people speaking your language show:

- that something could have happened, but did not.
- that something could be true now, but is not.
- that something could happen in the future, but will not unless something changes.
- that they wish for something, but it does not happen.
- that they regret that something did not happen.

Use your language's ways of showing these kinds of things.

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_hypo.

"

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 6:6](#)

Idiom

An idiom is a figure of speech made up of a group of words that, as a whole, has a meaning that is different from what one would understand from the meanings of the individual words. Someone from outside of the culture usually cannot understand an idiom without someone inside the culture explaining its true meaning. Every language uses idioms. Some English examples are:

- You are pulling my leg. (This means, “You are teasing me by telling me something that is not true.”)
- Do not push the envelope. (This means, “Do not take a matter to its extreme.”)
- This house is under water. (This means, “The debt owed for this house is greater than its actual value.”)
- We are painting the town red. (This means, “We are going around town tonight celebrating very intensely.”)

This page answers the question: *What are idioms and how can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Description

An idiom is a phrase that has a special meaning to the people of the language or culture who use it. Its meaning is different than what a person would understand from the meanings of the individual words that form the phrase.

He **set his face** to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51b ULT)

The words “set his face” is an idiom that means “decided.”

Sometimes people may be able to understand an idiom from another culture, but it might sound like a strange way to express the meaning.

I am not worthy that you would **come under my roof**. (Luke 7:6b ULT)

The phrase “come under my roof” is an idiom that means “enter my house.”

Put these words **into your ears**. (Luke 9:44a ULT)

This idiom means “Listen carefully and remember what I say.”

Purpose: An idiom is probably created in a culture somewhat by accident when someone describes something in an unusual way. But, when that unusual way communicates the message powerfully and people understand it clearly, other people start to use it. After a while, it becomes a normal way of talking in that language.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People can easily misunderstand idioms in the original languages of the Bible if they do not know the cultures that produced the Bible.
- People can easily misunderstand idioms that are in the source language Bibles if they do not know the cultures that made those translations.
- It is useless to translate idioms literally (according to the meaning of each word) when the target language audience will not understand what they mean.

Examples From the Bible

Then all Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “Look, we are your **flesh and bone**.” (1 Chronicles 11:1 ULT)

This means, “We and you belong to the same race, the same family.”

■ The children of Israel went out **with a high hand**. (Exodus 14:8b ASV)

This means, "The Israelites went out defiantly."

■ the one who **lifts up my head** (Psalm 3:3b ULT)

This means, "the one who helps me."

Translation Strategies

If the idiom would be clearly understood in your language, consider using it. If not, here are some other options.

- (1) Translate the meaning plainly without using an idiom.
- (2) Use a different idiom that people use in your own language that has the same meaning.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Translate the meaning plainly without using an idiom.

Then all Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Look, we are your **flesh and bone**." (1 Chronicles 11:1 ULT)

■ Look, we all **belong to the same nation**.

Then he **set his face** to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51b ULT)

■ He started to travel to Jerusalem, **determined to reach it**.

I am not worthy that you would come **under my roof**. (Luke 7:6b ULT)

■ I am not worthy that you should enter **my house**.

- (2) Use an idiom that people use in your own language that has the same meaning.

Put these words **into your ears**. (Luke 9:44a ULT)

■ **Be all ears** when I say these words to you.

My **eyes grow dim** from grief. (Psalm 6:7a ULT)

■ I am crying my **eyes out**

"

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 1:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:14](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:19](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:22](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:23](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:15](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:13](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:18](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:20](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:14](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:24](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:15](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:13](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:5](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:14](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:6](#)

Irony

Description

Irony is a figure of speech in which the sense that the speaker intends to communicate is actually the opposite of the literal meaning of the words. Sometimes a person does this by using someone else's words, but in a way that communicates that he does not agree with them. People do this to emphasize how different something is from what it should be, or how someone else's belief about something is wrong or foolish. It is often humorous.

This page answers the question: *What is irony and how can I translate it?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Then Jesus answered and said to them, "People who are well do not have need of a physician, but those who have sickness. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."
(Luke 5:31-32 ULT)

When Jesus spoke of "righteous people," he was not referring to people who were truly righteous, but to people who wrongly believed that they were righteous. By using irony, Jesus communicated that they were wrong to think that they were better than others and did not need to repent.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

If someone does not realize that a speaker is using irony, he will think that the speaker actually believes what he is saying. He will understand the passage to mean the opposite of what it was intended to mean.

Examples From the Bible

How well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your tradition! (Mark 7:9b ULT)

Here Jesus praises the Pharisees for doing something that is obviously wrong. Through irony, he communicates the opposite of praise: He communicates that the Pharisees, who take great pride in keeping the commandments, are so far from God that they do not even recognize that their traditions are breaking God's commandments. The use of irony makes the Pharisee's sin more obvious and startling.

"Present your case," says Yahweh; "present your best arguments for your idols," says the King of Jacob. **"Let them bring us their own arguments; have them come forward and declare to us what will happen, so we may know these things well. Have them tell us of earlier predictive declarations, so we can reflect on them and know how they were fulfilled."** (Isaiah 41:21-22 ULT)

People worshiped idols as if their idols had knowledge or power, and Yahweh was angry at them for doing that. So he used irony and challenged their idols to tell what would happen in the future. He knew that the idols could not do this, but by speaking as if they could, he mocked the idols, making their inability more obvious, and rebuked the people for worshiping them.

Can you lead light and darkness to their places of work? Can you find the way back to their houses for them? **Undoubtedly you know, for you were born then; "the number of your days is so large!"** (Job 38:20-21 ULT)

Job thought that he was wise. Yahweh used irony to show Job that he was not so wise. The two phrases in bold above are irony. They emphasize the opposite of what they say, because they are so obviously false. They emphasize that Job could not possibly answer God's questions about the creation of light because Job was not born until many, many years later.

Already you are satisfied! Already you have become rich! **You began to reign** apart from us, and I wish you really did reign, so that we also might reign with you. (1 Corinthians 4:8 ULT)

The Corinthians considered themselves to be very wise, self-sufficient, and not in need of any instruction from the Apostle Paul. Paul used irony, speaking as if he agreed with them, to show how proudly they were acting and how far from being wise they really were.

Translation Strategies

If the irony would be understood correctly in your language, translate it as it is stated. If not, here are some other strategies.

- (1) Translate it in a way that shows that the speaker is saying what someone else believes.
- (2) The irony is **not** found in the literal words of the speaker, but instead the true meaning is found in the opposite of the literal meaning of the speaker's words.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Translate it in a way that shows that the speaker is saying what someone else believes.

How well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your tradition! (Mark 7:9a ULT)

You think that you are doing well when you reject God's commandment so you may keep your tradition! **You act like it is good to reject God's commandment** so you may keep your tradition!

I did not come to call **the righteous**, but sinners to repentance. (Luke 5:32 ULT)

I did not come to call **people who think that they are righteous** to repentance, but to call sinners to repentance.

- (2) Translate the actual, intended meaning of the statement of irony.

How well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your tradition! (Mark 7:9a ULT)

You are doing a terrible thing when you reject the commandment of God so you may keep your tradition!

"Present your case," says Yahweh; "present your best arguments for your idols," says the King of Jacob. **"Let them bring us their own arguments; have them come forward and declare to us what will happen, so we may know these things well. Have them tell us of earlier predictive declarations, so we can reflect on them and know how they were fulfilled."** (Isaiah 41:21-22 ULT)

'Present your case,' says Yahweh; 'present your best arguments for your idols,' says the King of Jacob. Your idols **cannot bring us their own arguments or come forward to declare to us what will happen** so we may know these things well. We cannot hear them because **they cannot speak** to tell us their earlier predictive declarations, so we cannot reflect on them and know how they were fulfilled.

Can you lead light and darkness to their places of work? Can you find the way back to their houses for them? **Undoubtedly you know, for you were born then; the number of your days is so large!** (Job 38:20-21 ULT)

Can you lead light and darkness to their places of work? Can you find the way back to their houses for them? **You act like you know how light and darkness were created, as if you were there; as if you are as old as creation, but you are not!**

Next we recommend you learn about:

Litotes ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 4 General Notes](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:10](#)

Merism

Definition

Merism is a figure of speech in which a person refers to something by speaking of two extreme parts of it. By referring to the extreme parts, the speaker intends to include also everything in between those parts.

"I am **the alpha and the omega**," says the Lord God, "the one who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8 ULT)

I am **the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end**. (Revelation 22:13, ULT)

This page answers the question: *What does the word merism mean and how can I translate phrases that have it?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This is a merism that includes everything from the beginning to the end. It means eternal.

... I praise you, Father, Lord of **heaven and earth** ..., (Matthew 11:25b ULT)

Heaven and earth is a merism that includes everything that exists.

Reason This is a Translation Issue

Some languages do not use merism. The readers of those languages may think that the phrase only applies to the items mentioned. They may not realize that it refers to those two things and everything in between.

Examples From the Bible

From the rising of the sun to its setting, Yahweh's name should be praised. (Psalm 113:3 ULT)

This bolded phrase is a merism because it speaks of the east and the west and everywhere in between. It means "everywhere."

He will bless those who honor him, both **young and old**. (Psalm 115:13)

The bolded phrase is merism because it speaks of old people and young people and everyone in between. It means "everyone."

Translation Strategies

If the merism would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are other options:

- (1) Identify what the merism refers to without mentioning the parts.
- (2) Identify what the merism refers to and include the parts.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Identify what the merism refers to without mentioning the parts.

I praise you, Father, Lord of **heaven and earth**. (Matthew 11:25b ULT)

I praise you, Father, Lord of **everything**.

From the rising of the sun to its setting, Yahweh's name should be praised. (Psalm 113:3 ULT)

In all places, people should praise Yahweh's name.

(2) Identify what the merism refers to and include the parts.

I praise you, Father, Lord of **heaven and earth**. (Matthew 11:25b ULT)

I praise you, Father, Lord of **everything, including both what is in heaven and what is on earth**.

He will bless those who honor him, both **young and old**. (Psalm 115:13 ULT)

He will bless **all those** who honor him, regardless of whether they are **young or old**.

"

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 3:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:3](#)

Metaphor

Description

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which someone speaks of one thing as if it were a different thing because he wants people to think about how those two things are alike.

For example, someone might say, “The girl I love is a red rose.”

A girl and a rose are very different things, but the speaker considers that they are alike in some way. The hearer’s task is to understand in what way they are alike.

This page answers the question: *What is a metaphor and how can I translate a Bible passage that has one?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Simile ([UTA PDF](#))

The Parts of a Metaphor

The example above shows us that a metaphor has three parts. In this metaphor, the speaker is talking about “the girl I love.” This is the **Topic**. The speaker wants the hearer to think about what is similar between her and “a red rose.” The red rose is the **Image** to which he compares the girl. Most probably, he wants the hearer to consider that they are both beautiful. This is the **Idea** that the girl and the rose both share, and so we may also call it the **Point of Comparison**.

Every metaphor has three parts:

- The **Topic**, the item being immediately discussed by the writer/speaker.
- The **Image**, the physical item (object, event, action, etc.) which the speaker uses to describe the topic.
- The **Idea**, the abstract concept or quality that the physical **Image** brings to the mind of the hearer when he thinks of how the **Image** and the **Topic** are similar. Often, the **Idea** of a metaphor is not explicitly stated in the Bible, but it is only implied from the context. The hearer or reader usually needs to think of the **Idea** himself.

Using these terms, we can say that a metaphor is a figure of speech that uses a physical **Image** to apply an abstract **Idea** to the speaker’s **Topic**.

Usually, a writer or speaker uses a metaphor in order to express something about a **Topic**, with at least one **Point of Comparison (Idea)** between the **Topic** and the **Image**. Often in metaphors, the **Topic** and the **Image** are explicitly stated, but the **Idea** is only implied. The writer/speaker often uses a metaphor in order to invite the readers/listeners to think about the similarity between the **Topic** and the **Image** and to figure out for themselves the **Idea** that is being communicated.

Speakers often use metaphors in order to strengthen their message, to make their language more vivid, to express their feelings better, to say something that is hard to say in any other way, or to help people remember their message.

Sometimes speakers use metaphors that are very common in their language. However, sometimes speakers use metaphors that are uncommon, and even some metaphors that are unique. When a metaphor has become very common in a language, often it becomes a “passive” metaphor, in contrast to uncommon metaphors, which we describe as being “active.” Passive metaphors and active metaphors each present a different kind of translation problem, which we will discuss below.

Passive Metaphors

A passive metaphor is a metaphor that has been used so much in the language that its speakers no longer regard it as one concept standing for another. Linguists often call these “dead metaphors.” Passive metaphors are extremely common. Examples in English include the terms “table **leg**,” “family **tree**,” “book **leaf**” (meaning a page in

a book), or the word “crane” (meaning a large machine for lifting heavy loads). English speakers simply think of these words as having more than one meaning. Examples of passive metaphors in Biblical Hebrew include using the word “hand” to represent “power,” using the word “face” to represent “presence,” and speaking of emotions or moral qualities as if they were “clothing.”

Patterned Pairs of Concepts Acting as Metaphors

Many ways of metaphorical speaking depend on pairs of concepts, where one underlying concept frequently stands for a different underlying concept. For example, in English, the direction “up” (the Image) often represents the concepts of “more” or “better” (the Idea). Because of this pair of underlying concepts, we can make sentences such as “The price of gasoline is going **up**,” “A **highly** intelligent man,” and also the opposite kind of idea: “The temperature is going **down**,” and “I am feeling very **low**.”

Patterned pairs of concepts are constantly used for metaphorical purposes in the world’s languages because they serve as convenient ways to organize thought. In general, people like to speak of abstract qualities (such as power, presence, emotions, and moral qualities) as if they were body parts, or as if they were objects that could be seen or held, or as if they were events that could be watched as they happened.

When these metaphors are used in normal ways, it is rare that the speaker and audience regard them as figurative speech. Examples of metaphors in English that go unrecognized are:

- “Turn the heat **up**.” More is spoken of as up.
- “Let us **go ahead** with our debate.” Doing what was planned is spoken of as walking or advancing.
- “You **defend** your theory well.” Argument is spoken of as war.
- “A **flow** of words.” Words are spoken of as liquids.

English speakers do not view these as metaphorical expressions or figures of speech, so it would be wrong to translate them into other languages in a way that would lead people to pay special attention to them as figurative speech. For a description of important patterns of this kind of metaphor in biblical languages, please see [Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns](#) and the pages it will direct you to.

When translating something that is a passive metaphor into another language, do not treat it as a metaphor. Instead, just use the best expression for that thing or concept in the target language.

Active Metaphors

These are metaphors that people recognize as one concept standing for another concept, or one thing for another thing. Metaphors make people think about how the one thing is like the other thing, because in most ways the two things are very different. People also easily recognize these metaphors as giving strength and unusual qualities to the message. For this reason, people pay attention to these metaphors. For example,

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.
(Malachi 4:2a ULT)

Here, God speaks about his salvation as if it were the sun rising in order to shine its rays on the people whom he loves. He also speaks of the sun’s rays as if they were wings. Also, he speaks of these wings as if they were bringing medicine that would heal his people. Here is another example:

And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox ...” (Luke 13:32a ULT)

Here, “that fox” refers to King Herod. The people listening to Jesus certainly understood that Jesus was intending for them to apply certain characteristics of a fox to Herod. They probably understood that Jesus intended to communicate that Herod was evil, either in a cunning way or as someone who was destructive, murderous, or who took things that did not belong to him, or all of these.

Active metaphors require the translator’s special care to make a correct translation. To do so, you need to understand the parts of a metaphor and how they work together to produce meaning.

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35 ULT)

In this metaphor, Jesus called himself the bread of life. The **Topic** is “I” (meaning Jesus himself) and the **Image** is “bread.” Bread was the primary food that people ate in that place and time. The similarity between bread and Jesus is that people need both to live. Just as people need to eat food in order to have physical life, people need to trust in Jesus in order to have eternal life. The **Idea** of the metaphor is “life.” In this case, Jesus stated the central Idea of the metaphor, but often the Idea is only implied.

Purposes of Metaphor

- One purpose of metaphor is to teach people about something that they do not know (the **Topic**) by showing that it is like something that they already do know (the **Image**).
- Another purpose is to emphasize that something (the **Topic**) has a particular quality (the **Idea**) or to show that it has that quality in an extreme way.
- Another purpose is to lead people to feel the same way about the **Topic** as they would feel about the **Image**.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People may not recognize that something is a metaphor. In other words, they may mistake a metaphor for a literal statement, and thus, misunderstand it.
- People may not be familiar with the thing that is used as an image, and so, not be able to understand the metaphor.
- If the topic is not stated, people may not know what the topic is.
- People may not know the points of comparison that the speaker wants them to understand. If they fail to think of these points of comparison, they will not understand the metaphor.
- People may think that they understand the metaphor, but they do not. This can happen when they apply points of comparison from their own culture, rather than from the biblical culture.

Translation Principles

- Make the meaning of a metaphor as clear to the target audience as it was to the original audience.
- Do not make the meaning of a metaphor more clear to the target audience than you think it was to the original audience.

Examples From the Bible

Listen to this word, **you cows of Bashan**, (Amos 4:1q ULT)

In this metaphor Amos speaks to the upper-class women of Samaria (“you,” the Topic) as if they were cows (the Image). Amos does not say what similarity(s) he intends between these women and cows. He wants the reader to think of them, and he fully expects that readers from his culture will easily do so. From the context, we can see that he means that the women are like cows in that they are fat and interested only in feeding themselves. If we were to apply similarities from a different culture, such as that cows are sacred and should be worshiped, we would get the wrong meaning from this verse.

NOTE: Amos does not actually mean that the women are cows. He speaks to them as human beings.

Yet, Yahweh, you are our father; **we are the clay. You are our potter**; and we all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8 ULT)

The example above has two related metaphors. The Topic(s) are “we” and “you,” and the Image(s) are “clay” and “potter.” The similarity between a potter and God is the fact that both make what they wish out of their material.

The potter makes what he wishes out of the clay, and God makes what he wishes out of his people. The Idea being expressed by the comparison between the potter's clay and "us" is that **neither the clay nor God's people have a right to complain about what they are becoming.**

Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of **the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**"
The disciples reasoned among themselves and said, "It is because we did not take bread."
(Matthew 16:6-7 ULT)

Jesus used a metaphor here, but his disciples did not realize it. When he said "yeast," they thought he was talking about bread, but "yeast" was the Image in his metaphor, and the Topic was the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Since the disciples (the original audience) did not understand what Jesus meant, it would not be good to state clearly here what Jesus meant.

Translation Strategies

If people would understand the metaphor in the same way that the original readers would have understood it, go ahead and use it. Be sure to test the translation to make sure that people do understand it in the right way.

If people do not or would not understand it, here are some other strategies.

- (1) If the metaphor is a common expression in the source language or expresses a patterned pair of concepts in a biblical language (that is, it is a passive metaphor), then express the **Idea** in the simplest way preferred by your language.
- (2) If the metaphor seems to be an active metaphor, you can translate it literally **if you think that the target language also uses this metaphor in the same way to mean the same thing as in the Bible**. If you do this, be sure to test it to make sure that the language community understands it correctly.
- (3) If the target audience does not realize that it is a metaphor, then change the metaphor to a simile. Some languages do this by adding words such as "like" or "as." See [Simile](#).
- (4) If the target audience would not know the **Image**, see [Translate Unknowns](#) for ideas on how to translate that image.
- (5) If the target audience would not use that **Image** for that meaning, use an image from your own culture instead. Be sure that it is an image that could have been possible in Bible times.
- (6) If the target audience would not know what the **Topic** is, then state the topic clearly. (However, do not do this if the original audience did not know what the Topic was.)
- (7) If the target audience would not know the intended similarity (the **Idea**) between the topic and the image, then state it clearly.
- (8) If none of these strategies is satisfactory, then simply state the **Idea** plainly without using a metaphor.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If the metaphor is a common expression in the source language or expresses a patterned pair of concepts in a biblical language (that is, a passive metaphor), then express the Idea in the simplest way preferred by your language.

Then, see, one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, came, and when he saw him, **fell at his feet.** (Mark 5:22 ULT)

Then one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, came, and when he saw him, **immediately bowed down in front of him.**

- (2) If the metaphor seems to be an active metaphor, you can translate it literally **if you think that the target language also uses this metaphor in the same way to mean the same thing as in the Bible**. If you do this, be sure to test it to make sure that the language community understands it correctly.

But Jesus said to them, "He wrote this commandment to you because of your **hardness of heart.**" (Mark 10:5 ULT)

It was because of your **hard hearts** that he wrote you this law.

We made no change to this one, but it must be tested to make sure that the target audience correctly understands this metaphor.

(3) If the target audience does not realize that it is a metaphor, then change the metaphor to a simile. Some languages do this by adding words such as “like” or “as.”

Yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we **are the clay**. You **are our potter**; and we all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8 ULT)

And yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are **like** clay. You are **like** a potter; and we all are the work of your hand.

(4) If the target audience would not know the **Image**, see [Translate Unknowns](#) for ideas on how to translate that image.

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you **to kick against a goad**. (Acts 26:14b ULT)

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to **kick against a pointed stick**.

(5) If the target audience would not use that **Image** for that meaning, use an image from your own culture instead. Be sure that it is an image that could have been possible in Bible times.

Yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are the **clay**. You are our **potter**; and we all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8 ULT)

“And yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are the **wood**. You are our **carver**; and we all are the work of your hand.” “And yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are the **string**. You are the **weaver**; and we all are the work of your hand.”

(6) If the target audience would not know what the **Topic** is, then state the topic clearly. (However, do not do this if the original audience did not know what the topic was.)

Yahweh lives; may **my rock** be praised. May the God of my salvation be exalted. (Psalm 18:46 ULT)

Yahweh lives; **He is my rock**. May he be praised. May the God of my salvation be exalted.

(7) If the target audience would not know the intended similarity between the Topic and the Image, then state it clearly.

Yahweh lives; may **my rock** be praised. May the God of my salvation be exalted. (Psalm 18:46 ULT)

Yahweh lives; may he be praised because he is the rock **under which I can hide from my enemies**. May the God of my salvation be exalted.

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you **to kick against a goad**. (Acts 26:14 ULT)

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? You **fight against me and hurt yourself like an ox that kicks against its owner’s pointed stick**.

(8) If none of these strategies are satisfactory, then simply state the idea plainly without using a metaphor.

I will make you to become **fishers of men**. (Mark 1:17b ULT)

I will make you to become **people who gather men**. Now you gather fish.

I will make you **gather people**.

To learn more about specific metaphors, see [Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns](#).

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Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#); [Ecclesiastes 1:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:14](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:15](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:19](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:21](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:26](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:19](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:5](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:10](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:15](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:18](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:26](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:29](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:14](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:5](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:10](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:14](#)

Metonymy

Description

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which an item (either physical or abstract) is called not by its own name, but by the name of something closely associated with it. A metonym is a word or phrase used as a substitute for something that it is associated with.

This page answers the question: *What is a metonymy?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

... and **the blood** of Jesus his Son cleanses us from every sin. (1 John 1:7b ULT)

The blood represents Christ's death.

And he took **the cup** in the same way after supper, saying, "**This cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:20 ULT)

The cup represents the wine that is in the cup.

Metonymy can be used

- as a shorter way of referring to something
- to make an abstract idea more meaningful by referring to it with the name of a physical object associated with it

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

The Bible uses metonymy very often. Speakers of some languages are not familiar with metonymy and they may not recognize it when they read it in the Bible. If they do not recognize the metonymy, they will not understand the passage or, worse yet, they will get a wrong understanding of the passage. Whenever a metonym is used, people need to be able to understand what it represents.

Examples From the Bible

The Lord God will give to him **the throne** of his father David. (Luke 1:32b ULT)

A throne represents the authority of a king. "Throne" is a metonym for "kingly authority," "kingship," or "reign." This means that God would make him become a king who would follow King David.

Then immediately his **mouth** was opened (Luke 1:64a ULT)

The mouth here represents the power to speak. This means that he was able to talk again.

Who warned you to flee from **the wrath** that is coming? (Luke 3:7b ULT)

The word "wrath" or "anger" is a metonym for "punishment." God was extremely angry with the people and, as a result, he would punish them.

Translation Strategies

If people would easily understand the metonym, consider using it. Otherwise, here are some options.

- (1) Use the metonym along with the name of the thing it represents.
- (2) Use only the name of the thing the metonym represents.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Use the metonym along with the name of the thing it represents.

And he took the cup in the same way after the supper, saying, “**This cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” (Luke 22:20 ULT)

He took the cup in the same way after supper, saying, “**The wine in this cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

This verse also contains a second metonym: The cup, (representing the wine it contains) also represents the new covenant made with the blood Christ shed for us.

(2) Use the name of the thing the metonym represents.

The Lord God will give him **the throne** of his father David. (Luke 1:32b ULT)

“The Lord God will give him **the kingly authority** of his father, David.” or:
“The Lord God will **make him king** like his ancestor, King David.”

Who warned you to flee from **the wrath** that is coming? (Luke 3:7b ULT)

“Who warned you to flee from God’s coming **punishment**?”

To learn about some common metonymies, see [Biblical Imagery — Common Metonymies](#).

”

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 2:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:5](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:19](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:24](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:13](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:14](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:15](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:22](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:25](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:13](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:20](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:7](#)

Nominal Adjectives

Description

In some languages an adjective can be used to refer to a class of things that the adjective describes. When it does, it acts like a noun. For example, the word “rich” is an adjective. Here are two sentences that show that “rich” is an adjective.

The rich man had huge numbers of flocks and herds.
(2 Samuel 12:2 ULT)

The adjective “rich” comes before the word “man” and describes “man.”

He will not be rich; his wealth will not last. (Job 15:29a ULT)

The adjective “rich” comes after the verb “be” and describes “He.”

Here is a sentence that shows that “rich” can also function as a noun.

The rich must not give more than the half shekel, and **the poor** must not give less. (Exodus 30:15b ULT)

In Exodus 30:15, the word “rich” acts as a noun in the phrase “the rich,” and it refers to rich people. The word “poor” also acts as a noun and refers to poor people.

This page answers the question: *How do I translate adjectives that act like nouns?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Parts of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Many times in the Bible adjectives are used as nouns to describe a group of people.
- Some languages do not use adjectives in this way.
- Readers of these languages may think that the text is talking about one particular person when it is really talking about the group of people whom the adjective describes.

Examples From the Bible

The scepter of wickedness must not rule in the land of **the righteous**. (Psalms 125:3a ULT)

“The righteous” here are people who are righteous, not one particular righteous person.

Blessed are **the meek**. (Matthew 5:5a ULT)

“The meek” here are all people who are meek, not one particular meek person.

Translation Strategies

If your language uses adjectives as nouns to refer to a class of people, consider using the adjectives in this way. If it would sound strange, or if the meaning would be unclear or wrong, here is another option:

- (1) Use the adjective with a plural form of the noun that the adjective describes.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the adjective with a plural form of the noun that the adjective describes.

The scepter of wickedness must not rule in the land of **the righteous**. (Psalms 125:3a ULT)

The scepter of wickedness must not rule in the land of **righteous people**.

Blessed are **the meek**. (Matthew 5:5a ULT)

Blessed are **people who are meek**.

"

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 3:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:5](#)

Numbers

Description

There are many numbers in the Bible. They can be written as words (“five”) or as numerals (“5”). Some numbers are very large, such as “two hundred” (200), “twenty-two thousand” (22,000), or “one hundred million” (100,000,000). Some languages do not have words for all of these numbers. Translators need to decide how to translate numbers and whether to write them as words or numerals.

This page answers the question: *How do I translate numbers?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Translate Unknowns ([UTA PDF](#))

Some numbers are exact and others are rounded.

Abram was **86** years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (Genesis 16:16 ULT)

Eighty-six (86) is an exact number.

That day about **3,000** of the people died. (Exodus 32:28b ULT)

Here the number three thousand (3,000) is a round number. It may have been a little more than that or a little less than that. The word “about” shows that it is not an exact number.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Some languages do not have words for some of these numbers.

Translation Principles

- Exact numbers should be translated as closely and specifically as they can be.
- Rounded numbers can be translated more generally.

Examples From the Bible

When Jared had lived **162** years, he became the father of Enoch. After he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived **800** years. He became the father of more sons and daughters. Jared lived **962** years, and then he died. (Genesis 5:18-20 ULT)

The numbers 162, 800, and 962 are exact numbers and should be translated with something as close to those numbers as possible.

Our sister, may you be the mother of **thousands of ten thousands**. (Genesis 24:60b ULT)

This is a rounded number. It does not say exactly how many descendants she should have, but it was a huge number of them.

Translation Strategies

- (1) Write numbers using numerals.
- (2) Write numbers using your language’s words or the Gateway Language words for those numbers.
- (3) Write numbers using words, and put the numerals in parentheses after them.
- (4) Combine words for large numbers.
- (5) Use a very general expression for very large rounded numbers and write the numeral in parentheses afterward.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

We will use the following verse in our examples:

Now, see, at great effort I have prepared for Yahweh's house **100,000** talents of gold, **1,000,000** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities. (1 Chronicles 22:14a ULT)

(1) Write numbers using numerals.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house **100,000** talents of gold, **1,000,000** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

(2) Write numbers using your language's words or the Gateway Language words for those numbers.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house **one hundred thousand** talents of gold, **one million** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

(3) Write numbers using words, and put the numerals in parenthesis after them.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house one **hundred thousand (100,000)** talents of gold, **one million (1,000,000)** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

(4) Combine words for large numbers.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house **one hundred thousand** talents of gold, **a thousand thousand** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

(5) Use a very general expression for very large rounded numbers and write the numeral in parentheses afterward.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house **a great amount of gold (100,000 talents), ten times that amount of silver (1,000,000 talents)**, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

Consistency

Be consistent in your translations. Decide how the numbers will be translated, using numbers or numerals. There are different ways of being consistent.

- Use words to represent numbers all of the time. (You might have very long words.)
- Use numerals to represent numbers all of the time.
- Use words to represent the numbers that your language has words for and use numerals for the numbers that your language does not have words for.
- Use words for low numbers and numerals for high numbers.
- Use words for numbers that require few words and numerals for numbers that require more than a few words.
- Use words to represent numbers, and write the numerals in parentheses after them.

Consistency in the ULT and UST

The *unfoldingWord® Literal Text* (ULT) and the *unfoldingWord® Simplified Text* (UST) use words for the numbers one through ten and use numerals for all numbers above ten.

When Adam had lived **130** years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and he called his name Seth. After Adam became the father of Seth, he lived **800** years.

He became the father of more sons and daughters. Adam lived **930** years, and then he died.
(Genesis 5:3-5 ULT)

Next we recommend you learn about:

Ordinal Numbers ([UTA PDF](#))

Fractions ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 6:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:28](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:2](#)

Parallelism

Description

Parallelism is a poetic device in which two phrases or clauses that are similar in structure or idea are used together. The following are some of the different kinds of parallelism.

- The second clause or phrase means the same as the first. This is called synonymous parallelism.
- The second clarifies or strengthens the meaning of the first.
- The second completes what is said in the first.
- The second says something that contrasts with the first, but adds to the same idea.

Parallelism is most commonly found in Old Testament poetry, such as in the books of Psalms and Proverbs. It also occurs in Greek in the New Testament, both in the four gospels and in the apostles' letters.

This article will only discuss synonymous parallelism, the kind in which the two parallel phrases mean the same thing, because that is the kind that presents a problem for translation. Note that we use the term "synonymous parallelism" for long phrases or clauses that have the same meaning. We use the term "doublet" for words or very short phrases that mean basically the same thing and are used together.

In the poetry of the original languages, synonymous parallelism has several effects:

- It shows that something is very important by saying it more than once and in more than one way.
- It helps the hearer to think more deeply about the idea by saying it in different ways.
- It makes the language more beautiful and raises it above the ordinary way of speaking.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Some languages would not use synonymous parallelism. They would either think it odd that someone said the same thing twice, or, since it is in the Bible, they would think that the two phrases must have some difference in meaning. For them it would be confusing, rather than beautiful. They would not understand that the repetition of the idea in different words serves to emphasize the idea.

Examples From the Bible

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path. (Psalm 119:105 ULT)

Both parts of the sentence are metaphors saying that God's word teaches people how to live. That is the single idea. The words "lamp" and "light" are similar in meaning because they refer to light. The words "my feet" and "my path" are related because they refer to a person walking. Walking is a metaphor for living.

You make him to rule over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet (Psalm 8:6 ULT)

Both lines say that God made man the ruler of everything. "To rule over" is the same idea as putting things "under his feet," and "the works of your [God's] hands" is the same idea as "all things."

Yahweh sees everything a person does
and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

This page answers the question: *What is parallelism?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

The first phrase and the second phrase mean the same thing. There are three ideas that are the same between these two phrases. "Sees" corresponds to "watches," "everything...does" corresponds to "all the paths...takes," and "a person" corresponds to "he."

Praise Yahweh, all you nations;
exalt him, all you peoples! (Psalm 117:1 ULT)

Both parts of this verse tell people everywhere to praise Yahweh. The words 'Praise' and 'exalt' mean the same thing. The words 'Yahweh' and 'him' refer to the same person. The terms 'all you nations' and 'all you peoples' refer to the same people.

For Yahweh has a lawsuit with his people,
and he will fight in court against Israel. (Micah 6:2b ULT)

The two parts of this verse say that Yahweh has a serious disagreement with his people, Israel. These are not two different disagreements or two different groups of people.

Translation Strategies

For most kinds of parallelism, it is good to translate both of the clauses or phrases. For synonymous parallelism, it is good to translate both clauses if people in your language understand that the purpose of saying something twice is to strengthen a single idea. But if your language does not use parallelism in this way, then consider using one of the following translation strategies.

- (1) Combine the ideas of both clauses into one.
- (2) If it appears that the clauses are used together to show that what they say is really true, you could combine the ideas of both clauses into one and include words that emphasize the truth such as "truly" or "certainly."
- (3) If it appears that the clauses are used together to intensify an idea in them, you could combine the ideas of both clauses into one and use words like "very," "completely," or "all."

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Combine the ideas of both clauses into one.

Until now you have dealt deceitfully with me and you have spoken lies to me. (Judges 16:13, ULT)

Delilah expressed this idea twice to emphasize that she was very upset.

Until now you have deceived me with your lies.
Yahweh sees everything a person does and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

The phrase "all the paths he takes" is a metaphor for "all he does."

Yahweh pays attention to everything a person does.
For Yahweh has a lawsuit with his people, and he will fight in court against Israel. (Micah 6:2 ULT)

This parallelism describes one serious disagreement that Yahweh had with one group of people. If this is unclear, the phrases can be combined:

For Yahweh has a lawsuit with his people, Israel.

- (2) If it appears that the clauses are used together to show that what they say is really true, you could combine the ideas of both clauses into one and include words that emphasize the truth such as "truly" or "certainly."

Yahweh sees everything a person does and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

Yahweh truly sees everything a person does.

You make him to rule over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet
(Psalm 8:6 ULT)

You have certainly made him to rule over everything that you have
created.

(3) If it appears that the clauses are used together to intensify an idea in them, you could combine the ideas of both clauses into one and use words like “very,” “completely” or “all.”

Until now you have dealt deceitfully with me and you have spoken lies to me. (Judges 16:13, ULT)

All you have done is lie to me.

Yahweh sees everything a person does and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

Yahweh sees absolutely everything that a person does.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Personification ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:22](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:26](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:15](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:20](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:9](#)

Personification

Description

Personification is a figure of speech in which someone speaks of something as if it could do things that animals or people can do. People often do this because it makes it easier to talk about things that we cannot see:

Such as wisdom:

Does not Wisdom call out? (Proverbs 8:1a ULT)

Or sin:

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT)

People also use personification because it is sometimes easier to talk about people's relationships with non-human things such as wealth as if they were relationships between people.

You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24b ULT)

In each case, the purpose of the personification is to highlight a certain characteristic of the non-human thing. As in metaphor, the reader needs to think of the way that the thing is like a certain kind of person.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some languages do not use personification.
- Some languages use personification only in certain situations.

Examples From the Bible

You cannot **serve** God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24b ULT)

Jesus speaks of wealth as if it were a master whom people might serve. Loving money and basing one's decisions on it is like serving it as a slave would serve his master.

Does not Wisdom **call** out? Does not Understanding **raise her voice**? (Proverbs 8:1 ULT)

The author speaks of wisdom and understanding as if they were woman who calls out to teach people. This means that they are not something hidden, but something obvious that people should pay attention to.

Translation Strategies

If the personification would be understood clearly, consider using it. If it would not be understood, here are some other ways for translating it.

- (1) Add words or phrases to make the human (or animal) characteristic clear.
- (2) In addition to Strategy (1), use words such as "like" or "as" to show that the sentence is not to be understood literally.
- (3) Find a way to translate it without the personification.

This page answers the question: *What is personification?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Add words or phrases to make the human (or animal) characteristic clear.

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT) — God speaks of sin as if it were a wild animal that is waiting for the chance to attack. This shows how dangerous sin is. An additional phrase can be added to make this danger clear.

Sin is at your door, **waiting to attack you**.

(2) In addition to Strategy (1), use words such as “like” or “as” to show that the sentence is not to be understood literally.

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT) — This can be translated with the word “as.”

Sin is crouching at the door, **just as a wild animal does as it waits to attack a person..**

(3) Find a way to translate it without the personification.

Even the **winds and the sea obey him**. (Matthew 8:27b ULT) — The men speak of the “wind and the sea” as if they are able to hear and obey Jesus, just as people can. This could also be translated without the idea of obedience by speaking of Jesus controlling them.

He even **controls the winds and the sea**.

NOTE: We have broadened our definition of “personification” to include “zoomorphism” (speaking of other things as if they had animal characteristics) and “anthropomorphism” (speaking of non-human things as if they had human characteristics) because the translation strategies for them are the same.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Apostrophe ([UTA PDF](#))

Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 1:5](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:10](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:1](#)

Reflexive Pronouns

Description

All languages have ways of showing that the same person fills two different roles in a sentence. English does this by using reflexive pronouns. These are pronouns that refer to someone or something that has already been mentioned in a sentence. In English the reflexive pronouns are: “myself,” “yourself,” “himself,” “herself,” “itself,” “ourselves,” “yourselves,” and “themselves.” Other languages may have other ways to show this.

This page answers the question: *What are reflexive pronouns?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[Pronouns \(UTA PDF\)](#)

[Sentence Structure \(UTA PDF\)](#)

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Languages have different ways of showing that the same person fills two different roles in a sentence. For those languages, translators will need to know how to translate the English reflexive pronouns.
- The reflexive pronouns in English also have other functions.

Uses of Reflexive Pronouns

- To show that the same person or things fills two different roles in a sentence
- To emphasize a person or thing in the sentence
- To show that someone did something alone
- To show that someone or something was alone

Examples From the Bible

Reflexive pronouns are used to show the same person or thing fills two different roles in a sentence.

If **I** should testify about **myself**, my testimony would not be true. (John 5:31 ULT)

Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and **many** went up to Jerusalem from the country before the Passover in order to purify **themselves**. (John 11:55 ULT)

Reflexive pronouns are used to emphasize a person or thing in the sentence.

Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were. (John 4:2 ULT)

So they left the crowd, taking Jesus with them, just as he was, in the boat. There also were other boats with him. Then a violent windstorm arose and the waves were breaking into the boat so that the boat was already full of water. But **Jesus himself** was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. (Mark 4:36-38a ULT)

Reflexive pronouns are used to show that someone did something alone.

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and seize him by force to make him king, he withdrew again up the mountain **by himself**. (John 6:15 ULT)

Reflexive pronouns are used to show that someone or something was alone.

He saw the linen cloths lying there and the cloth that had been on his head. **It** was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a place **by itself**. (John 20:6b-7 ULT)

Translation Strategies

If a reflexive pronoun would have the same function in your language, consider using it. If not, here are some other strategies.

(1) In some languages people put something on the verb to show that the object of the verb is the same as the subject. (2) In some languages people emphasize a certain person or thing by referring to it in a special place in the sentence. (3) In some languages people emphasize a certain person or thing by adding something to that word or putting another word with it. (4) In some languages people show that someone did something alone by using a word like “alone.” (5) In some languages people show that something was alone by using a phrase that tells about where it was.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) In some languages people modify the verb to show that the object of the verb is the same as the subject.

If I should testify about **myself** alone, my testimony would not be true. (John 5:31)

“If I should **self-testify** alone, my testimony would not be true.”

Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem from the country before the Passover in order to **purify themselves**. (John 11:55)

“Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out from country before the Passover in order to **self-purify**.”

(2) In some languages people emphasize a certain person or thing by referring to it in a special place in the sentence.

He himself took our sickness and bore our diseases. (Matthew 8:17 ULT)

“**It was he who** took our sickness and bore our diseases.”

Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were. (John 4:2)

“**It was not Jesus who** was baptizing, but his disciples were.”

(3) In some languages people emphasize a certain person or thing by adding something to that word or putting another word with it. English adds the reflexive pronoun.

But Jesus said this to test Philip, for he **himself** knew what he was going to do. (John 6:6)

(4) In some languages people show that someone did something alone by using a word like “alone.”

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and seize him by force to make him king, he withdrew again up the mountain **by himself**. (John 6:15)

“When Jesus realized that they were about to come and seize him by force to make him king, he withdrew again **alone** up the mountain.”

(5) In some languages people show that something was alone by using a phrase that tells about where it was.

He saw the linen cloths lying there and the cloth that had been on his head. It was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up in a place **by itself**. (John 20:6b-7 ULT)

“He saw the linen cloths lying there and the cloth that had been on his head. It was not lying with the linen cloths but was folded up and lying **in its own place**.”

"

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 7:22](#)

Rhetorical Question

A rhetorical question is a question that a speaker asks when he is more interested in expressing his attitude about something than in getting information about it. Speakers use rhetorical questions to express deep emotion or to encourage hearers to think deeply about something. The Bible contains many rhetorical questions, often to express surprise, to rebuke or scold the hearer, or to teach. Speakers of some languages use rhetorical questions for other purposes as well.

This page answers the question: *What are rhetorical questions and how can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Sentence Types ([UTA PDF](#))

Description

A rhetorical question is a question that strongly expresses the speaker's attitude toward something. Often the speaker is not looking for information at all. Or, if he is asking for information, it is not usually the information that the question appears to ask for. The speaker is more interested in expressing his attitude than in getting information.

But those who stood by said, **"Are you insulting the high priest of God?"**(Acts 23:4 ULT)

The people who asked Paul this question were not asking if he was insulting God's high priest. Rather, they used this question to accuse Paul of insulting the high priest.

The Bible contains many rhetorical questions. These rhetorical questions might be used for the purposes: of expressing attitudes or feelings, rebuking people, teaching something by reminding people of something they know and encouraging them to apply it to something new, or introducing something they want to talk about.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some languages do not use rhetorical questions; for them a question is always a request for information.
- Some languages use rhetorical questions, but for purposes that are different or more limited than in the Bible.
- Because of these differences between languages, some readers might misunderstand the purpose of a rhetorical question in the Bible.

Examples From the Bible

Do you not still rule the kingdom of Israel? (1 Kings 21:7b ULT)

Jezebel used the question above to remind King Ahab of something he already knew: he still ruled the kingdom of Israel. The rhetorical question made her point more strongly than if she had merely stated it, because it forced Ahab to admit the point himself. She did this in order to rebuke him for being unwilling to take over a poor man's property. She was implying that, since he was the king of Israel, he had the power to take the man's property.

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number! (Jeremiah 2:32 ULT)

God used the question above to remind his people of something they already knew: a young woman would never forget her jewelry or a bride forget her veils. He then rebuked his people for forgetting him who is so much greater than those things.

Why did I not die when I came out from the womb? (Job 3:11a ULT)

Job used the question above to show deep emotion. This rhetorical question expresses how sad he was that he did not die as soon as he was born. He wished that he had not lived.

And how has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord would come to me? (Luke 1:43 ULT)

Elizabeth used the question above to show how surprised and happy she was that the mother of her Lord came to her.

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9 ULT)

Jesus used the question above to remind the people of something they already knew: a good father would never give his son something bad to eat. By introducing this point, Jesus could go on to teach them about God with his next rhetorical question:

Therefore, if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him? (Matthew 7:11 ULT)

Jesus used this question to teach the people in an emphatic way that God gives good things to those who ask him.

What is the kingdom of God like, and what can I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed that a man took and threw into his garden ... (Luke 13:18b-19a ULT)

Jesus used the question above to introduce what he was going to talk about. He was about to compare the kingdom of God to something. In this case, he compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed.

Translation Strategies

In order to translate a rhetorical question accurately, first be sure that the question you are translating truly is a rhetorical question and is not an information question. Ask yourself, "Does the person asking the question already know the answer to the question?" If so, it is a rhetorical question. Or, if no one answers the question, did the person who asked it expect to receive an answer? If not, it is a rhetorical question.

When you are sure that the question is rhetorical, then be sure that you understand the purpose for the rhetorical question. Is it to encourage or rebuke or shame the hearer? Is it to bring up a new topic? Is it to do something else?

When you know the purpose of the rhetorical question, then think of the most natural way to express that purpose in the target language. It might be as a question, or a statement, or an exclamation.

If using the rhetorical question would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider doing so. If not, here are other options:

(1) Add the answer after the question. (2) Change the rhetorical question to a statement or exclamation. (3) Change the rhetorical question to a statement, and then follow it with a short question. (4) Change the form of the question so that it communicates in your language what the original speaker communicated in his.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Add the answer after the question.

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number! (Jeremiah 2:32 ULT)

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? **Of course not!** Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number!

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9 ULT)

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? **None of you would do that!**

(2) Change the rhetorical question to a statement or exclamation.

What is the kingdom of God like, and what can I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed. (Luke 13:18-19a ULT)

This is what the kingdom of God is like. It is like a mustard seed ...

Are you insulting the high priest of God? (Acts 23:4b ULT) (Acts 23:4 ULT)

You should not insult God's high priest!

Why did I not die when I came out from the womb? (Job 3:11a ULT)

I wish I had died when I came out from the womb!

And how has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Luke 1:43 ULT)

How wonderful it is that the mother of my Lord has come to me!

(3) Change the rhetorical question to a statement, and then follow it with a short question.

Do you not still rule the kingdom of Israel? (1 Kings 21:7b ULT)

You still rule the kingdom of Israel, **do you not?**

(4) Change the form of the question so that it communicates in your language what the original speaker communicated in his.

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9 ULT)

If your son asks you for a loaf of bread, **would you give him a stone?**

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number! (Jeremiah 2:32 ULT)

What virgin would forget her jewelry, and what bride would forget her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number

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Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 1:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 1:10](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:15](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:19](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:22](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:25](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:21](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:22](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:10](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:13](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:24](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:14](#)

Simile

Description

A simile is a comparison of two things that are not normally thought to be similar. The simile focuses on a particular trait the two items have in common, and it includes the words “like,” “as,” or “than.”

This page answers the question: *What is a simile?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were troubled and discouraged, **like sheep not having a shepherd**. (Matthew 9:36)

Jesus compared the crowds of people to sheep without a shepherd. Sheep grow frightened when they do not have a good shepherd to lead them in safe places. The crowds were like that because they did not have good religious leaders.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**, so be as wise **as the serpents** and harmless **as the doves**. (Matthew 10:16 ULT)

Jesus compared his disciples to sheep and their enemies to wolves. Wolves attack sheep; Jesus' enemies would attack his disciples.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper **than any two-edged sword**. (Hebrews 4:12a ULT)

God's word is compared to a two-edged sword. A two-edged sword is a weapon that can easily cut through a person's flesh. God's word is very effective in showing what is in a person's heart and thoughts.

Purposes of Simile

- A simile can teach about something that is unknown by showing how it is similar to something that is known.
- A simile can emphasize a particular trait, sometimes in a way that gets people's attention.
- Similes help form a picture in the mind or help the reader experience what he is reading about more fully.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People may not know how the two items are similar.
- People may not be familiar with both of the items being compared.

Examples From the Bible

Suffer hardship with me, **as a good soldier** of Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 2:3 ULT)

In this simile, Paul compares suffering with what soldiers endure, and he encourages Timothy to follow their example.

Just as the lightning flashing from a place under the sky shines to another place under the sky, so will the Son of Man be. (Luke 17:24b ULT)

This verse does not tell how the Son of Man will be like the lightning. But in context we can understand from the verses before it that just as lightning flashes suddenly and everyone can see it, the Son of Man will come suddenly and everyone will be able to see him. No one will have to be told about it.

Translation Strategies

If people would understand the correct meaning of a simile, consider using it. If they would not, here are some strategies you can use:

(1) If people do not know how the two items are alike, tell how they are alike. However, do not do this if the meaning was not clear to the original audience. (2) If people are not familiar with the item that something is compared to, use an item from your own culture. Be sure that it is one that could have been used in the cultures of the Bible. If you use this strategy, you may want to put the original item in a footnote. (3) Simply describe the item without comparing it to another.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If people do not know how the two items are alike, tell how they are alike. However, do not do this if the meaning was not clear to the original audience.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**. (Matthew 10:16a ULT) — This compares the danger that Jesus' disciples would be in with the danger that sheep are in when they are surrounded by wolves.

See, I send **you out among wicked people** and you will be in danger from them **as sheep are in danger when they are among wolves**.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper **than any two-edged sword**. (Hebrews 4:12a ULT)

For the word of God is living and active and **more powerful than a very sharp two-edged sword**.

(2) If people are not familiar with the item that something is compared to, use an item from your own culture. Be sure that it is one that could have been used in the cultures of the Bible. If you use this strategy, you may want to put the original item in a footnote.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**, (Matthew 10:16a ULT) — If people do not know what sheep and wolves are, or that wolves kill and eat sheep, you could use some other animal that kills another.

See, I send you out **as chickens in the midst of wild dogs**.

How often did I long to gather your children together, just **as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings**, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37b ULT)

How often I wanted to gather your children together, **as a mother closely watches over her infants**, but you refused!

If you have faith **as a grain of mustard** ... (Matthew 17:20)

If you have faith even as small **as a tiny seed**,

(3) Simply describe the item without comparing it to another.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**. (Matthew 10:16a ULT)

See, I send you out among **people who will want to harm you**.

How often did I long to gather your children together, just **as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings**, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37b ULT)

How often I wanted to **protect you**, but you refused!

Next we recommend you learn about:

Metaphor ([UTA PDF](#))

Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 1:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:13](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:18](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:13](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:12](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:11](#)

Symbolic Action

Description

A symbolic action is something that someone does in order to express a certain idea. For example, in some cultures people nod their heads up and down to mean “yes” or turn their heads from side to side to mean “no.” Symbolic actions do not mean the same things in all cultures. In the Bible, sometimes people perform symbolic actions and sometimes they only refer to the symbolic action.

This page answers the question: *What is a symbolic action and how do I translate it?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Translate Unknowns ([UTA PDF](#))

Examples of symbolic actions

- In some cultures people shake hands when they meet to show that they are willing to be friendly.
- In some cultures people bow when they meet to show respect to each other.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

An action may have a meaning in one culture and a different meaning or no meaning at all in another culture. For example, in some cultures raising the eyebrows means “I am surprised” or “What did you say?” In other cultures it means “yes.”

In the Bible, people did things that had certain meanings in their culture. When we read the Bible, we might not understand what someone meant if we interpret the action based on what it means in our own culture today.

You (the translator) need to understand what people in the Bible meant when they used symbolic actions. If an action does not mean the same thing in your own culture, then you need to figure out how to translate what the action meant.

Examples From the Bible

And behold, a man came whose name was Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue. And **falling at the feet of Jesus**, he begged him to come to his house. (Luke 8:41 ULT)

Meaning of symbolic action: He did this to show great respect to Jesus.

Look, I am standing at the door and am knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and will eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20 ULT)

Meaning of symbolic action: When people wanted someone to welcome them into their home, they stood at the door and knocked on it.

Translation Strategies

If people would correctly understand what a symbolic action meant to the people in the Bible, consider using it. If not, here are some strategies for translating it.

- (1) Tell what the person did and why he did it.
- (2) Do not tell what the person did, but tell what he meant.
- (3) Use an action from your own culture that has the same meaning. Do this only in poetry, parables, and sermons. Do not do this when there actually was a person who did a specific action.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Tell what the person did and why he did it.

And **falling at the feet of Jesus** (Luke 8:41 ULT)

Jairus fell down at Jesus' feet in order to show that he greatly respected him.

Look, I am **standing at the door and am knocking**. (Revelation 3:20 ULT)

Look, I stand at the door and knock on it, asking you to let me in.

(2) Do not tell what the person did, but tell what he meant.

And **falling at the feet of Jesus** (Luke 8:41 ULT)

Jairus showed Jesus great respect.

Look, I am **standing at the door and am knocking**. (Revelation 3:20 ULT)

Look, I stand at the door and ask you to let me in.

(3) Use an action from your own culture that has the same meaning.

And **falling at the feet of Jesus** (Luke 8:41 ULT) — Since Jairus actually did this, you should not substitute an action from your own culture.

Look, I am **standing at the door and am knocking**. (Revelation 3:20 ULT) — Jesus was not standing at a real door. Rather he was speaking about wanting to have a relationship with people. So in cultures where it is polite to clear one's throat when wanting to be let into a house, you could use that.

Look, I stand at the door and clear my throat.

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Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 4:5](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:8](#)

Synecdoche

Description

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a speaker uses a part of something to refer to the whole thing, or uses the whole to refer to a part.

■ **My soul** magnifies the Lord. (Luke 1:46b ULT)

Mary was very happy about what the Lord was doing, so she said “my soul,” which means the inner, emotional part of herself, to refer to her whole self.

■ So **the Pharisees** said to him, “Look, why are they doing that which is not lawful?” (Mark 2:24a ULT)

The Pharisees who were standing there did not all say the same words at the same time. Instead, it is more likely that one man representing the group said those words.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some readers may not recognize the synecdoche and thus misunderstand the words as a literal statement.
- Some readers may realize that they are not to understand the words literally, but they may not know what the meaning is.

Example From the Bible

■ Then I looked on all the deeds that **my hands** had accomplished. (Ecclesiastes 2:11a ULT)

“My hands” is a synecdoche for the whole person because clearly the arms and the rest of the body and the mind were also involved in the person’s accomplishments. The hands are chosen to represent the person because they are the parts of the body most directly involved in the work.

Translation Strategies

If the synecdoche would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here is another option:

(1) State specifically what the synecdoche refers to.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) State specifically what the synecdoche refers to.

■ “**My soul** magnifies the Lord.” (Luke 1:46b ULT)

■ “**I** magnify the Lord.”

So **the Pharisees** said to him ... (Mark 2:24a ULT)

■ **A representative of the Pharisees** said to him ...

Then I looked on all the deeds that **my hands** had accomplished. (Ecclesiastes 2:11a ULT)

■ I looked on all the deeds that **I** had accomplished

This page answers the question: *What is a synecdoche, and how can I translate such a thing into my language?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Metonymy ([UTA PDF](#))

Biblical Imagery — Common Metonymies ([UTA PDF](#))

Next we recommend you learn about:

Metonymy ([UTA PDF](#))

Biblical Imagery — Common Metonymies ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 1:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 1:13](#); [Ecclesiastes 1:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 1:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:10](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:15](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:20](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:18](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:8](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 6:3](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:4](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:5](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:16](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:10](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:14](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:18](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:5](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:6](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:7](#); [Ecclesiastes 11:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 12:12](#)

Translate Unknowns

While working to translate the Bible, you (the translator) might find yourself asking: “How do I translate words like lion, fig tree, mountain, priest, or temple when people in my culture have never seen these things and we do not have a word for them?”

This page answers the question: *How can I translate ideas that my readers are not familiar with?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[Sentence Structure \(UTA PDF\)](#)

Description

Unknowns are things that occur in the source text that are not known to the people of your culture. The unfoldingWord® Translation Words pages and the unfoldingWord® Translation Notes will help you understand what they are. After you understand them, you will need to find ways to refer to those things so that people who read your translation will understand what they are.

They said to him, “We have nothing here except five loaves of **bread** and two fish.” (Matthew 14:17 ULT)

Bread is a particular food made by mixing finely crushed grains with oil, and then cooking the mixture so that it is dry. (Grains are the seeds of a kind of grass.) In some cultures people do not have bread and do not know what it is.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Readers may not know some of the things that are in the Bible because those things are not part of their own culture.
- Readers may have difficulty understanding a text if they do not know some of the things that are mentioned in it.

Translation Principles

- Use words that are already part of your language if possible.
- Keep expressions short if possible.
- Represent God’s commands and historical facts accurately.

Examples From the Bible

So I will turn Jerusalem into piles of ruins, a hideout for **jackals**. (Jeremiah 9:11a ULT)

Jackals are wild animals like dogs that live in only a few parts of the world. So they are not known in many places.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous **wolves**. (Matthew 7:15 ULT)

If wolves do not live where the translation will be read, the readers may not understand that they are fierce, wild animals like dogs that attack and eat sheep.

They offered him wine mixed with **myrrh**, but he did not drink it. (Mark 15:23 ULT)

People may not know what myrrh is and that it was used as a medicine.

... to him who made **great lights** ... (Psalm 136:7a ULT)

Some languages have terms for things that give light, like the sun and fire, but they have no general term for lights.

Your sins ... will be white like **snow**. (Isaiah 1:18b ULT)

People in many parts of the world have not seen snow, but they may have seen it in pictures.

Translation Strategies

Here are ways you might translate a term that is not known in your language:

- (1) Use a phrase that describes what the unknown item is, or what is important about the unknown item for the verse being translated.
- (2) Substitute something similar from your language if doing so does not falsely represent a historical fact.
- (3) Copy the word from another language, and add a general word or descriptive phrase to help people understand it.
- (4) Use a word that is more general in meaning.
- (5) Use a word or phrase that is more specific in meaning.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use a phrase that describes what the unknown item is, or what is important about the unknown item for the verse being translated.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but are inwardly they are **ravenous wolves**. (Matthew 7:15 ULT)

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but **inwardly they are very hungry and dangerous animals**.

"Ravenous wolves" is part of a metaphor here, so the reader needs to know that they are very dangerous to sheep in order to understand this metaphor. (If sheep are also unknown, then you will need to also use one of the translation strategies to translate sheep, or change the metaphor to something else, using a translation strategy for metaphors. See [Translating Metaphors](#).)

"We have nothing here except five **loaves of bread** and two fish." (Matthew 14:17 ULT)

We have nothing here except five **loaves of baked grain seeds** and two fish.

- (2) Substitute something similar from your language if doing so does not falsely represent a historical fact.

Your sins ... will be white like **snow**. (Isaiah 1:18b ULT) This verse is not about snow. It uses snow in a figure of speech to help people understand how white something will be.

Your sins ... will be white like **milk**.

Your sins ... will be white like **the moon**.

- (3) Copy the word from another language, and add a general word or descriptive phrase to help people understand it.

Then they tried to give Jesus wine that was mixed with **myrrh**. But he refused to drink it. (Mark 15:23 ULT) — People may understand better what myrrh is if it is used with the general word "medicine."

Then they tried to give Jesus wine that was mixed with **a medicine called myrrh**. But he refused to drink it.

"We have nothing here except five **loaves of bread** and two fish." (Matthew 14:17 ULT) —
People may understand better what bread is if it is used with a phrase that tells what it is made
of (seeds) and how it is prepared (crushed and baked).

We have nothing here except five loaves of **baked crushed seed bread**
and two fish.

(4) Use a word that is more general in meaning.

I will turn Jerusalem into piles of ruins, a hideout for **jackals** (Jeremiah 9:11a ULT)

I will turn Jerusalem into piles of ruins, a hideout for **wild dogs**

"We have nothing here except five **loaves of bread** and two fish." (Matthew 14:17 ULT)

We have nothing here except five **loaves of baked food** and two fish.

(5) Use a word or phrase that is more specific in meaning.

... to him who made **great lights** ... (Psalm 136:7a ULT)

to him who made **the sun and the moon**

Next we recommend you learn about:

Copy or Borrow Words ([UTA PDF](#))

How to Translate Names ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 12:5](#)



unfoldingWord® Translation Words

Version 77

evil, wicked, unpleasant

Definition:

In the Bible, the term “evil” can refer either to the concept of moral wickedness or emotional unpleasantness. The context will usually make it clear which meaning is intended in the specific instance of the term.

- While “evil” may describe a person’s character, “wicked” may refer more to a person’s behavior. However, both terms are very similar in meaning.
- The term “wickedness” refers to the state of being that exists when people do wicked things.
- The results of evil are clearly shown in how people mistreat others by killing, stealing, slandering and being cruel and unkind.

Translation Suggestions:

- Depending on the context, the terms “evil” and “wicked” can be translated as “bad” or “sinful” or “immoral.”
- Other ways to translate these could include “not good” or “not righteous” or “not moral.”
- Make sure the words or phrases that are used to translate these terms fit the context that is natural in the target language.

(See also: disobey, [sin](#), [good](#), [righteous](#), [demon](#))

Bible References:

- 1 Samuel 24:11
- 1 Timothy 6:10
- 3 John 1:10
- Genesis 2:17
- Genesis 6:5-6
- Job 1:1
- Job 8:20
- Judges 9:57
- Luke 6:22-23
- Matthew 7:11-12
- Proverbs 3:7
- Psalms 22:16-17

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **2:4** “God just knows that as soon as you eat it, you will be like God and will understand good and **evil** like he does.”
- **3:1** After a long time, many people were living in the world. They had become very **wicked** and violent.
- **3:2** But Noah found favor with God. He was a righteous man living among **wicked** people.
- **4:2** God saw that if they all kept working together to do **evil**, they could do many more sinful things.
- **8:12** “You tried to do **evil** when you sold me as a slave, but God used the **evil** for good!”
- **14:2** They (Canaanites) worshiped false gods and did many **evil** things.
- **17:1** But then he (Saul) became a **wicked** man who did not obey God, so God chose a different man who would one day be king in his place.
- **18:11** In the new kingdom of Israel, all the kings were **evil**.
- **29:8** The king was so angry that he threw the **wicked** servant into prison until he could pay back all of his debt.
- **45:2** They said, “We heard him (Stephen) speak **evil** things about Moses and God!”

- **50:17** He (Jesus) will wipe away every tear and there will be no more suffering, sadness, crying, **evil**, pain, or death.

Word Data:

- Strong's: H0205, H0605, H1100, H1681, H1942, H2154, H2162, H2254, H2617, H3399, H3415, H4209, H4849, H5753, H5766, H5767, H5999, H6001, H6090, H7451, H7455, H7489, H7561, H7562, H7563, H7564, G00920, G01130, G04590, G09320, G09870, G09880, G14260, G25490, G25510, G25540, G25550, G25560, G25570, G25590, G25600, G26350, G26360, G41510, G41890, G41900, G41910, G53370

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Referenced in: [Introduction to Ecclesiastes](#)

judge, judgment

Definition:

The terms “judge” and “judgment” often refer to making a decision about whether or not something is good, wise, or right. However, these terms can also refer to actions performed by a person as the result of a decision, usually in the context of deciding that something is bad, wrong, or evil.

- The terms “judge” and “judgment” can also mean “to cause harm to” (usually because God has decided a person or nation’s actions are wicked).
- The “judgment of God” often refers to his decision to condemn something or someone as sinful.
- God’s judgment usually includes punishing people for their sin.
- The term “judge” can also mean “condemn.” God instructs his people not to judge each other in this way.
- Another meaning is “arbitrate between” or “judge between,” as in deciding which person is right in a dispute between them.
- In some contexts, God’s “judgments” are what he has decided is right and just. They are similar to his decrees, laws, or precepts.
- “Judgment” can refer to wise decision-making ability. A person who lacks “judgment” does not have the wisdom to make wise decisions.

Translation Suggestions:

- Depending on the context, ways to translate to “judge” could include to “decide” or to “condemn” or to “punish” or to “decree.”
- The term “judgment” could be translated as “punishment” or “decision” or “verdict” or “decree” or “condemnation.”
- In some contexts, the phrase “in the judgment” could also be translated as “on judgment day” or “during the time when God judges people.”

(See also: [decree](#), [judge](#), [judgment day](#), [just](#), [law](#), [law](#))

Bible References:

- 1 John 4:17
- 1 Kings 3:9
- Acts 10:42-43
- Isaiah 3:14
- James 2:4
- Luke 6:37
- Micah 3:9-11
- Psalm 54:1

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **19:16** The prophets warned the people that if they did not stop doing evil and start obeying God, then God would **judge** them as guilty, and he would punish them.
- **21:8** A king is someone who rules over a kingdom and **judges** the people. The Messiah would come would be the perfect king who would sit on the throne of his ancestor David. He would reign over the whole world forever, and who would always **judge** honestly and make the right decisions.
- **39:4** The high priest tore his clothes in anger and shouted to the other religious leaders, “We do not need any more witnesses! You have heard him say that he is the Son of God. What is your **judgment**?”

- **50:14** But God will **judge** everyone who does not believe in Jesus. He will throw them into hell, where they will weep and grind their teeth in anguish forever.

Word Data:

- Strong's: H0148, H0430, H1777, H1778, H1779, H1780, H1781, H1782, H2940, H4055, H4941, H6414, H6415, H6416, H6417, H6419, H6485, H8196, H8199, H8201, G01440, G03500, G09680, G11060, G12520, G13410, G13450, G13480, G13490, G29170, G29190, G29200, G29220, G29230, G42320

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Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 9 General Notes](#)

wise, wisdom

Definition:

The term “wise” describes someone who understands what is the right and moral thing to do and then does that. “Wisdom” is the understanding and practice of what is true and morally right.

- Being wise includes the ability to make good decisions, especially choosing to do what pleases God.
- People become wise by listening to God and humbly obeying his will.
- A wise person will show the fruits of the Holy Spirit in his life, such as joy, kindness, love, and patience.

Translation Suggestions:

- Depending on the context, other ways to translate “wise” could include “obedient to God” or “sensible and obedient” or “God-fearing.”
- “Wisdom” could be translated by a word or phrase that means “wise living” or “sensible and obedient living” or “good judgment.”
- It is best to translate “wise” and “wisdom” in such a way that they are different terms from other key terms like righteous or obedient.

(See also: obey, [fruit](#))

Bible References:

- Acts 6:3
- Colossians 3:15-17
- Exodus 31:6
- Genesis 3:6
- Isaiah 19:12
- Jeremiah 18:18
- Matthew 7:24

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **2:5** She also wanted to be **wise**, so she picked some of the fruit and ate it.
- **18:1** When Solomon asked for **wisdom**, God was pleased and made him the **wisest** man in the world.
- **23:9** Some time later, **wise** men from countries far to the east saw an unusual star in the sky.
- **45:1** He (Stephen) had a good reputation and was full of the Holy Spirit and of **wisdom**.

Word Data:

- Strong's: H0998, H1350, H2445, H2449, H2450, H2451, H2452, H2454, H2942, H3820, H3823, H6195, H6493, H6912, H7535, H7919, H7922, H8454, G46780, G46790, G46800, G49200, G54280, G54290, G54300

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Referenced in: [Ecclesiastes 8 General Notes](#)

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